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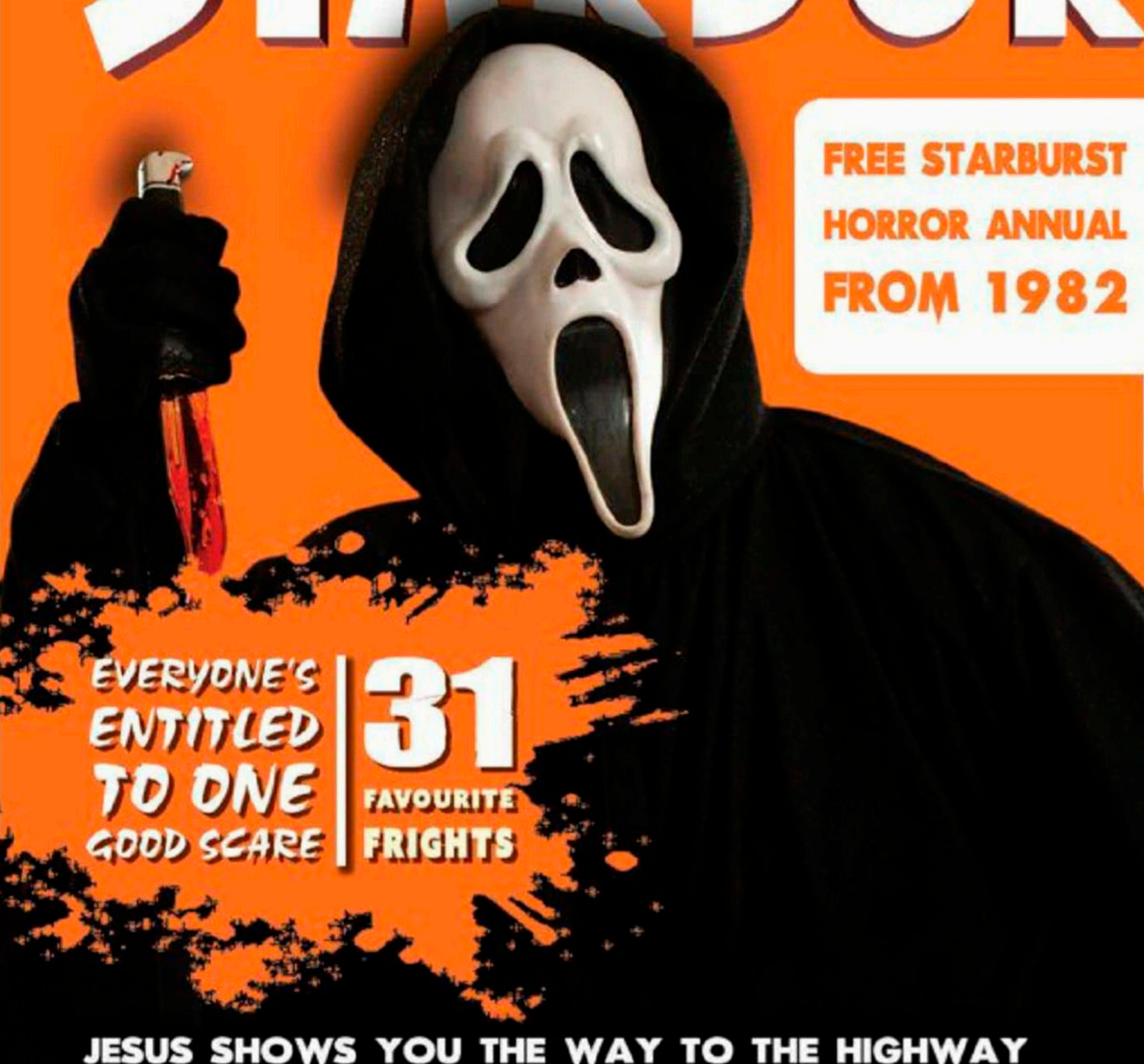

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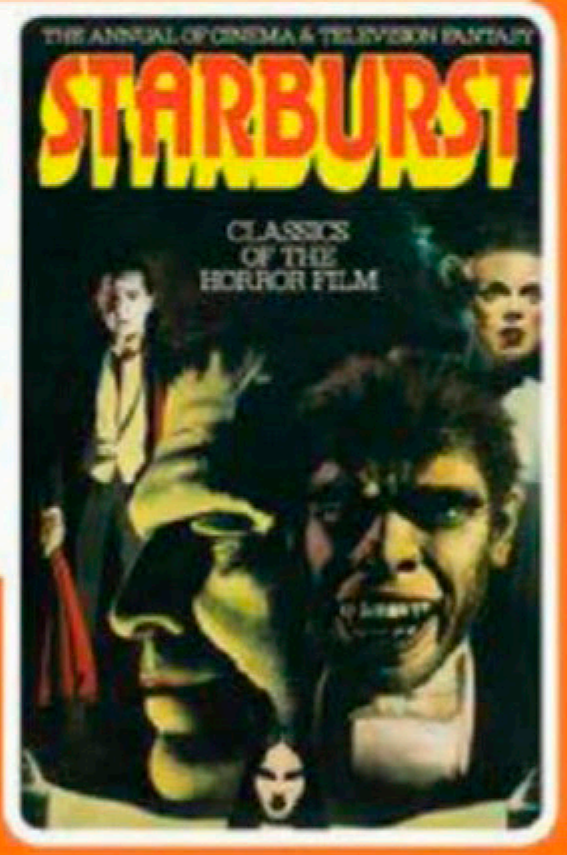

THE ANNUAL OF CINEMA & TELEVISION FANTASY

STARBURST

CLASSICS OF THE HORROR FILM

EVERYONE'S ENTITLED TO ONE GOOD SCARE

31 FAVOURITE FRIGHTS

JESUS SHOWS YOU THE WAY TO THE HIGHWAY

THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW AT 40

IMMERSIVE SCARES

AGATHA CHRISTIE

TRUTH SEEKERS

DAVID LYNCH

CANDYMAN

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FEATURING:

LAKE PLACID VS. ANACONDA
SATURDAY 3rd OCTOBER 9PM

FIRSTBORN
SATURDAY 4th OCTOBER 9PM

SELFIE FROM HELL
FRIDAY 9th OCTOBER 9PM

PET
SATURDAY 10th OCTOBER 10:40PM

LEPRECHAUN RETURNS
SATURDAY 17th OCTOBER 9PM

ECHOES OF FEAR
SUNDAY 18th OCTOBER 9PM

THE ASCENT
FRIDAY 23rd OCTOBER 9PM

THE BROOD
SATURDAY 24th OCTOBER 10:35PM

THE RESIDENT
SUNDAY 25th OCTOBER 9PM

THE HALLOW
SATURDAY 31st OCTOBER 9PM

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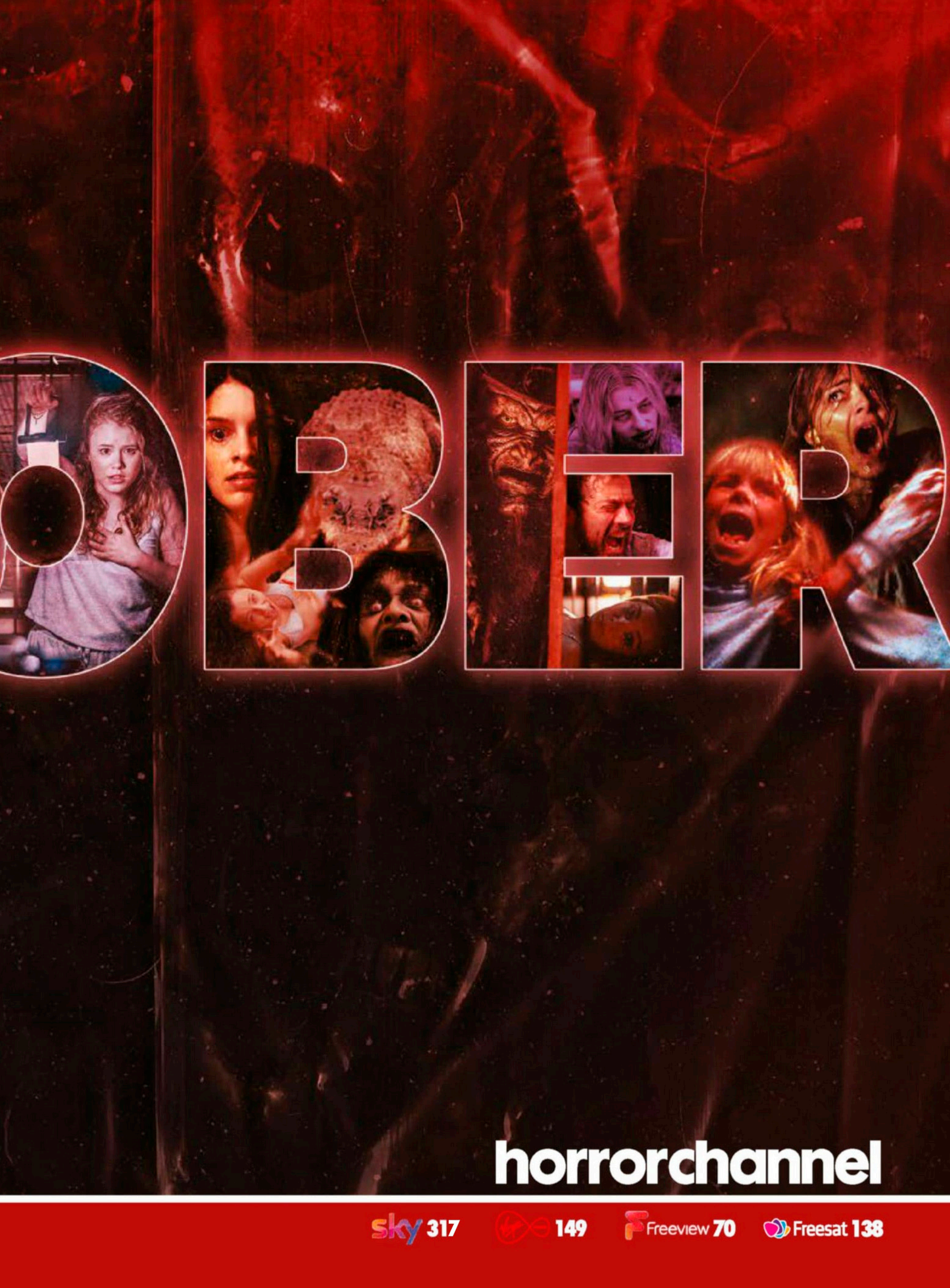
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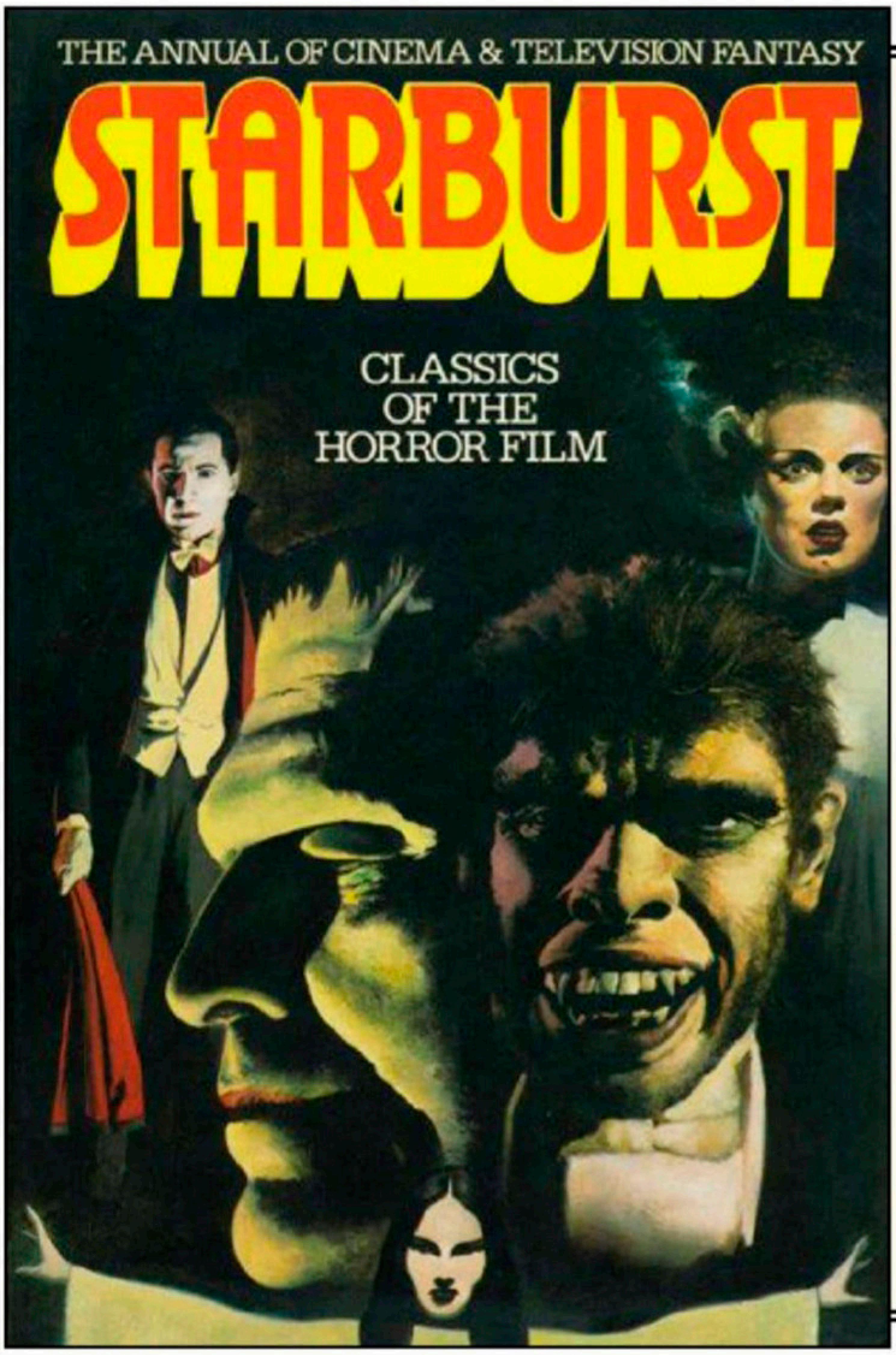
EDITORIAL

I could pretend that this issue of **STARBURST Magazine** is a profoundly intellectual examination of the human psyche. A delve into the psychology of horror and the way that affects all of us. A Research into the reasons why a human mind reaches into its defence barriers to deflect negative emotions. It is probably best to 'fess up and admit that in the midst of the current global situation, with firm cinema release dates still such an uncertainty, we thought it would be awesome to have an issue that brought you our 31 favourite screen moments where we shat ourselves instead.

Fear is a tricky beast. We have all got movies that we consider classics but within those flicks are sometimes a primal moment. Just to wind Kris Heys up, I will mention the moment in **Jaws 2** when Bigger Boat Man grabs a piece of wood and gets presented with a corpse. He can see no redeeming value in that movie, but that scared my mate Brian and me senseless at the Ritz Cinema back in 1978. At some point, I will recreate that moment for Kris in a **Scare Tactics** gag. He will still hate the movie, though.


THE ANNUAL OF CINEMA & TELEVISION FANTASY
STARBURST
CLASSICS OF THE HORROR FILM

You can't rescue a bad film with this trick. You are invested at the point a '*scare*' or '*jump scare*' occurs, or you are bored senseless. When you get a stone-cold classic, however, it is likely the moment that you cherish and look forward to on every rewatch. It is the moment that you have ruined for every person you know that you convinced to watch it. Our cover feature pays loving tribute to those primal moments - the sequences where you were roped in and then regretted ever setting foot in the cinema. What you have here is a potent list of defecation potential. We cannot be held responsible for your personal relationships. If you sit them down to one of these, you do so at your own risk!

This issue has many other features and your personal favourites, but we are also giving away a precious tome that both myself and Martin Unsworth used as a horror bible in our younger days. On this page you will find a download code for a free digital edition of the indispensable **STARBURST 1982 Classic of the Horror Film Annual**. This was a masterclass in its day and is well-deserving of a reread.

This issue and your free Horror Annual will keep your minds off some of the real-world stuff. Read the annual carefully though... there is a quiz later!

Until next issue, keep watching the weird and wonderful,

Jordan Royce

STARBURST GIVEAWAY!

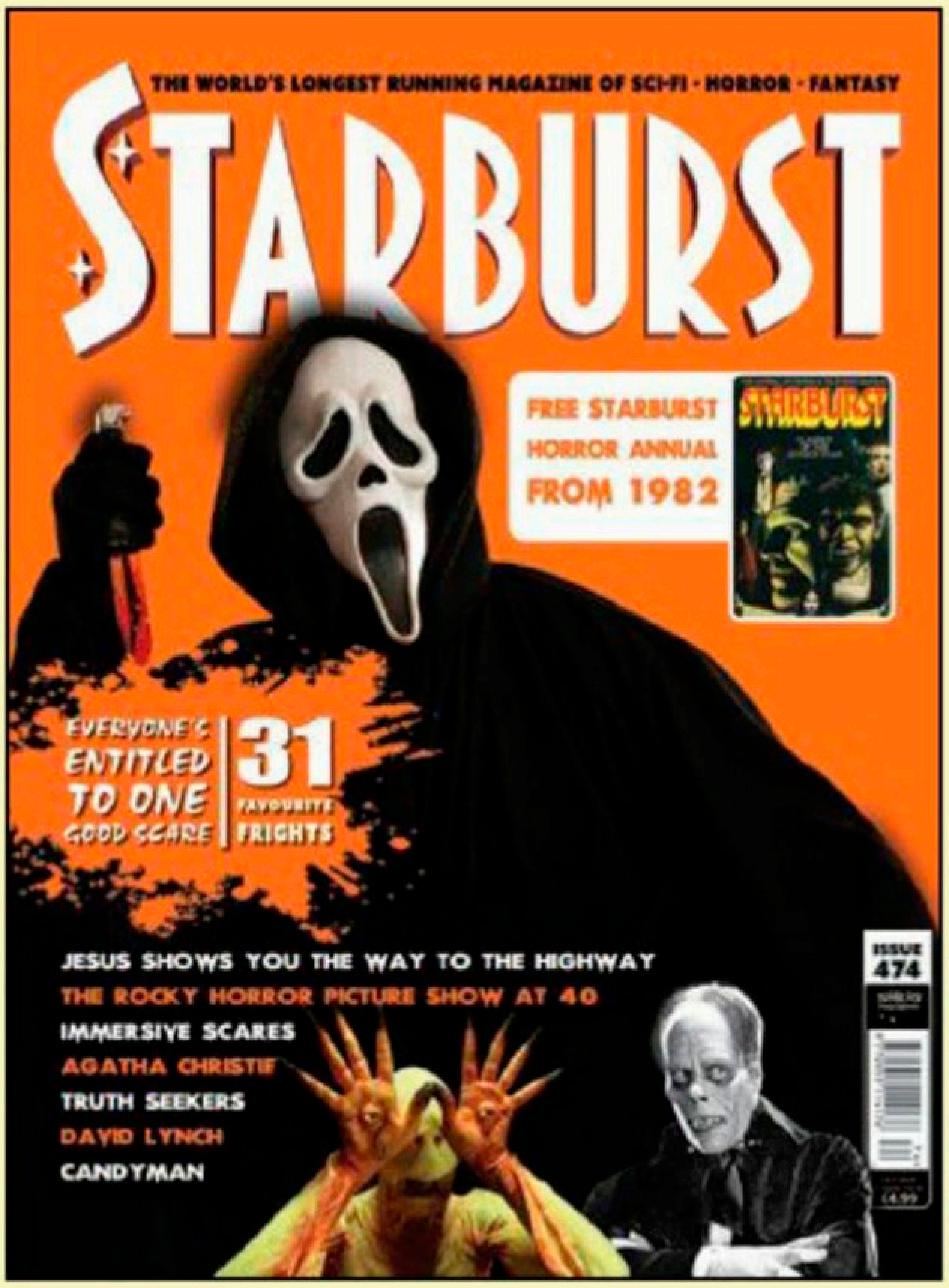
Grab yourself a FREE Digital copy of the much-loved STARBURST annual from 1982, CLASSICS OF THE HORROR FILM!

The **Classics of the Horror Film** Annual features a run-down of horror cinema from the thirties to the end of the seventies, providing a crash-course in movie history all in one place. For many at the time, it was a bible of information about films we'd perhaps never heard of, and most of us had hardly seen. From the Universal Monsters, science fiction-influenced flicks of the '50s, to the raw, brutal movies of the '60s and '70s, **Classics of the Horror Film** is a fantastic read and will bring back memories for many long-time readers.

How to claim your free e-book...

All you have to do is head to the STARBURST web store - starburstmagazine.com/store - add the annual to your basket, and use the code ClassicHorrorFree at the checkout (the code prompt is above the basket contents). This will allow you to download the e-book and enjoy it forever!

The Sixties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ISSUE 474

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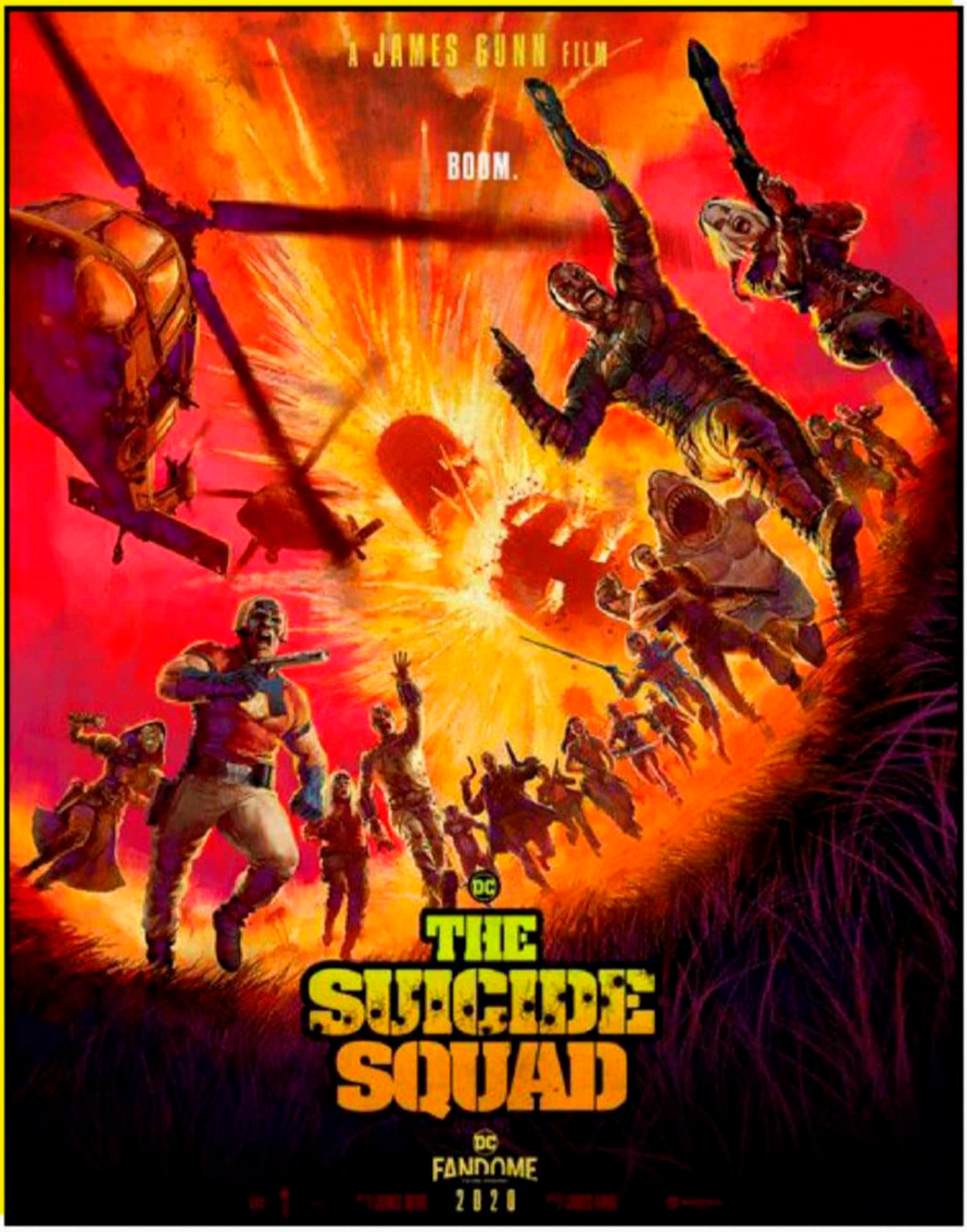
THINGS TO COME

THE ESSENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN GENRE ENTERTAINMENT...



With the DC FanDome extravaganza taking place recently, a whole host of DC Comics-driven news was dropped on the watching masses. While Matt Reeves' **The Batman** and James Gunn's **The Suicide Squad** got mesmerising trailers and shiny new posters, there's so much else to unpack on the DC front this issue. Starting things off with the Scarlet Speedster, and director Andy Muschietti's **The Flash** will see Ezra Miller's Barry Allen joined by not one, but two incarnations of Batman. While we still can't get over the news that Michael Keaton will be suiting up once more as the Caped Crusader for **The Flash**, it's now been revealed that Ben Affleck will likewise be donning the cape and cowl again. After playing the Dark Knight in **Batman v Superman**, **Suicide Squad**, and **Justice League**, it was thought that Affleck's time as the World's Greatest Detective was done. Now though, Muschietti has explained how Batfleck will have a pivotal part to play in the first picture to be headlined by Miller's Sultan of Speed. Likewise, Keaton's Batman will have a substantial role in **The Flash**. At present, the tentative plan is for **The Flash** to speed to the silver screen at some point in 2022.

Before **The Flash**, Ben Affleck and Ezra Miller's heroes will be seen once more in **Justice League: The Snyder Cut**. Zack Snyder's original vision for **Justice League** will hit the HBO Max streaming service next year, and we've now learned that this version of the film will consist of four one-hour parts. Yes, **The Snyder Cut** will come in at a combined four-hour run time! If you remember, Snyder sadly had to step away from **Justice League** in the middle of production due to the tragic loss of his daughter. As a result, Warner Bros. brought in Joss Whedon to complete the film – which involved several reshoots and completely different scenes to those planned by Snyder. With so much new footage and so many new elements to be incorporated into **The Snyder Cut**, we now know that Ray Fisher's Vic Stone/Cyborg will serve as the movie's anchor – plus we'll get an appearance from the nefarious Darkseid!

One other hugely welcome piece of news to come out of DC FanDome is that plans are afoot for a live-action **Static Shock** movie. That was revealed by Milestone Media's Reggie Hudlin during a panel discussion, with Hudlin casually dropping in that talks are underway to bring Virgil Hawkins to the big screen. Created by Milestone founders Denys Cowan, Dwayne McDuffie, Derek T. Tingle and Michael Davis, Static made his comic book bow back in June 1993. A teenager who develops electromagnetic-based abilities after being exposed to a radioactive chemical, Virgil quickly became a favourite of many. Of course, the popularity of Static was taken to a whole other level when the animated **Static Shock** series debuted in 2000, going on to run for four seasons and with Static appearances to follow in **Justice League Unlimited** and **Young Justice**. In addition to plans for a **Static Shock** movie, the character will also be getting a new comic book title this coming February.

In other DC movie news, November 2022's **Shazam!** sequel has been officially titled **Shazam!: Fury of the Gods**, and Dwayne Johnson's **Black Adam** has been confirmed to feature some familiar Justice Society faces. Those faces will be Hawkman, Doctor Fate, Cyclone, and Atom Smasher. Already, Noah Centineo – who recently signed on to star as He-

Man in Paramount's **Masters of the Universe** reboot – has been cast as Atom Smasher, with the other roles still to be filled. Having been in some form of development for a decade by this point in time, **Black Adam** has now finally been given a December 22nd, 2021 release date.

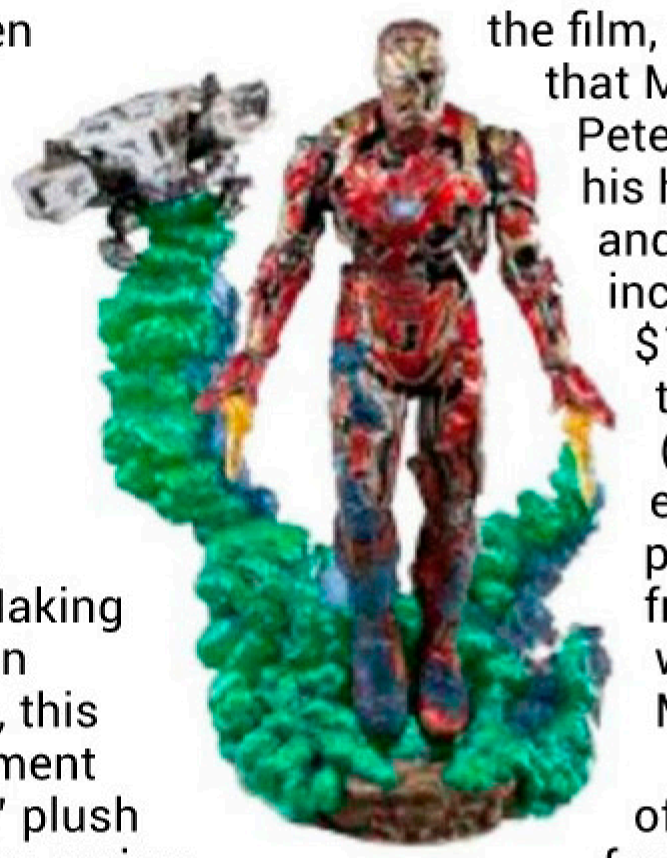
For fans of the ever-brilliant animated output of Warner Bros. where it pertains to its DC properties, new animated films are on the way in the form of **Batman: Soul of the Dragon**, **Justice Society: World War II**, and **Batman: The Long Halloween**.

Arriving early next year, **Soul of the Dragon** is a '70s-set martial arts picture featuring Batman, Bronze Tiger, Lady Shiva, and Richard Blood, while **Justice Society: World War II** will take the action back to the time of DC's original superhero team who predated the Justice League. But wait, did we say **Batman: The Long Halloween**?!?! You did indeed read that right, for one of the most beloved Bat-tales in history is being adapted into a two-part animated offering. From the stunning pairing of Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale, **The Long Halloween** centres on a mysterious killer who strikes on each of the year's holidays. With Batman, Jim Gordon, and Harvey Dent all desperately trying to decipher the identity of the Holiday Killer, the tale features a who's who of Batman's supporting players, such as the Joker, Catwoman, Riddler, Scarecrow, Mad Hatter, and Sal Maroni.

On the topic of animated DC movies, the recently-released **Superman: Man of Tomorrow** (review on page 73) has been confirmed to be the launching point for a new shared universe of heroes and villains. Earlier this year, the seven-year, 15-movie run of the previous shared DC realm came to a close when Barry Allen raced off to start a new timeline at the climax of the phenomenal **Justice League Dark: Apokolips War**. Despite initially being presumed to be a standalone tale, we now know that the impressive **Man of Tomorrow** will actually be the start of a whole new world of characters and movies going forward.

Down on the small screen, the third season of **Titans** is shaping up nicely with the news that Barbara Gordon, Scarecrow, and Red Hood will all be a part of the show's next year. The early word is that this version of Barbara will have already given up the Batgirl moniker in favour of trying to replace her father as Commissioner of the Gotham City Police Department. Where Scarecrow is concerned, this version of Jonathan Crane will be an Arkham Asylum inmate who is utilised as a police consultant. From what we can gauge, think of Crane as a little like Hannibal Lecter in **The Silence of the**

WATTO'S EMPORIUM



This year, Steven Spielberg's seminal blockbuster **Jaws** celebrated 45 years of scaring peeps out of the water (as well as their skins) and now Bruce is back and cuter than ever! Making a big splash at San Diego Comic-Con, this Factory Entertainment limited edition 12" plush recreates the pulse-racing floating barrels sequence from the film, with three detatchable barrels coming with this plushy little Brucie boy!

Another mind-blowing spot recently was a new hand-painted statue that brings to horrifying life one of the greatest scenes from the greatly under-appreciated **Spider-Man: Far From Home**. In fact it's one of the best MCU scenes overall for our money. From **ironstudios.com**, this immaculate 1/10 scale statue resurrects the undead or zombified (whichever you prefer) Iron Man (complete with smoking drone and glitchy patches) from the film, the ghoulish mindf**k that Mysterio torments Peter Parker with during his hallucinogenic assault, and it's absolutely incredible. Retailing at $179.99 and available to pre-order now (releasing at the back end of 2020), this luxury piece is drawn straight from the horror of that wonderful sequence. Marvel indeed.

And before we sign off for another Watto's, forgive us this detour into the harshness that is reality but with face masks being at the heart of many a discussion, we just had to talk about these immensely fun movie monsters range of face masks from artist Rob Sheridan for your consideration. These masks are incredibly cool and available at **robsheridan.threadless.com**. The first line was released back in May, and included the Xenomorph, Yautja, T-800, Jason Voorhees, Chatterer, the Gill-Man, and a zombie. Now we have Series 2 and it's just as splendid, including **Batman: The Animated Series** Joker and Harley Quinn, **Silence of the Lambs**' Hannibal Lector, two variations of Pennywise from the recent **IT** double-bill, the crites, and the facehugger! They retail between $14 and $20 each, with all profits going to charity.

JAWS
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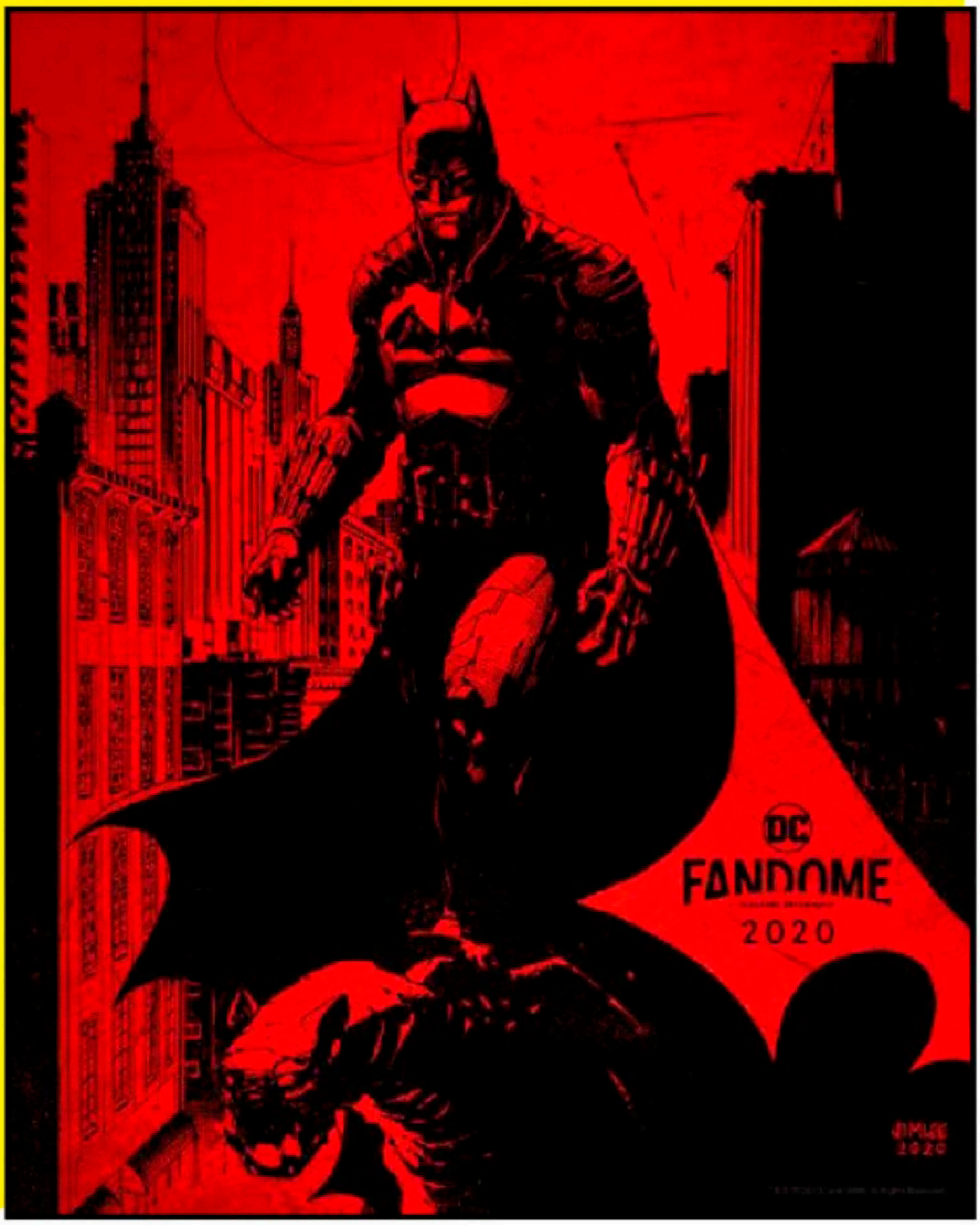
MERCH NEWS BY JACK BOTTOMLEY



Lambs. And then, well then there's the fascinating proposition of Red Hood. The name Red Hood is one that will instantly send alarm bells ringing for long-time comics fans, for that mantle was first used by the pre-Joker Joker. More recently, the past 15 years or so have seen the Red Hood name become synonymous with the resurrected Jason Todd. After being murdered by the Joker in **A Death in the Family**, Jason was eventually brought back to the pages of DC Comics as a badass, brutal vigilante who was more than happy to kill off any bad guys. In addition to clinically stopping criminals, Red Hood resented Batman for how the Dark Knight didn't kill the Joker as an act of revenge for Todd's death – which in turn put the resurrected Jason on a collision course with the Bat-family. Does these mean that Curran Walters' Jason Todd will end up dead and somehow resurrected in **Titans**' third season? It would certainly seem so. This all sounds extremely exciting for **Titans** fans, but the less encouraging news is that the ongoing global pandemic means that it's uncertain just when production will be able to commence... | AP

THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE

With the **Evil Dead** reboot's Fede Álvarez having been on board to produce Legendary Pictures' **Texas Chainsaw Massacre** relaunch since last September, the film has now undergone a major change in the director's chair. Previously, **The Dig** duo Ryan and Andy Tohill were on directing duties, but the Tohills have now departed the film over the ever-familiar creative differences. In their place, **Tejano**'s David Blue Garcia has been tasked with helming the latest antics of the Sawyer clan. Interestingly, the movie had already been in production in Bulgaria for a week when the Tohill brothers exited the film, but all of the footage already shot has been scrapped, with Garcia to start afresh. The current plan is for this next effort to connect to Tobe Hooper's 1974 movie, while also being a jumping-off point for what Legendary hopes will be a new trilogy of films for the franchise. We wish them luck. | AP

TRON 3

After a decade of rumours, a third **Tron** movie is finally happening! As previously speculated, Jared Leto is now officially on board to star in this as-yet-to-be-titled offering, with award-winning filmmaker Garth Davis directing. Details are minimal right now, but it is believed that the picture will follow in the footsteps of 1982's **Tron** and 2010's **Tron: Legacy**. Joseph Kosinski's **Tron: Legacy** split opinion amongst audiences, although even the sequel's biggest detractors couldn't help but be amazed by its jaw-dropping visuals and stunning soundtrack. That follow-up saw Garrett Hedlund's Sam Flynn heading into the Grid on a mission to locate his genius computer programming father (Jeff Bridges). | AP

THE EXORCIST

Having laid dormant from cinemas for 15 years now, **The Exorcist** franchise is heading back to the big screen. It's early days on the project right now, but Morgan Creek Entertainment is at work on rebooting the franchise for a release at some point in 2021. By the fact that the term reboot is being bandied around for this movie, that seemingly rules out any sort of out-and-out remake of William Friedkin's iconic 1973 film – itself based on William Peter Blatty's **The Exorcist** novel. Since Friedkin's **The Exorcist** terrorised moviegoers in '73, horror hounds have been given follow-ups in the form of **Exorcist II: The Heretic**, **The Exorcist III**, and then there was the mess that was 2004's **Exorcist: The Beginning** and 2005's **Dominion: Prequel to the Exorcist**, which were essentially two different versions of the same film. More recently, FOX aired a TV take on **The Exorcist** that ran for two extraordinary seasons before being cruelly cancelled in 2018. Can they just not bring that back to life instead? | AP

DOCTOR WHO

While we're still awaiting news of just how long **Doctor Who** Series 13 has been delayed by the pandemic, it's been a busy time for spin-off media as multi-platform saga **Time Lord Victorious** has started rolling out. Its enormous story begins with the Tenth Doctor going back to the Dark Times of the universe in an attempt to take on the Kotturuh, an alien race who deal out mortality; his actions have serious consequences and tie into stories featuring the Eighth and Ninth Doctors. The first issue of Titan Comics' contribution to this saga is out now, with further releases across comics, novels, audios and more to come across the rest of the year, followed by **Time Fracture**, an 'immersive theatrical event', opening up in London from February 2021. For the full timeline of releases, see the BBC's official Time Lord Victorious webpage.

But the biggest – and most surprising – update from the world of **Who** is that Christopher Eccleston has signed up to return as the fan-favourite Ninth Doctor in a series of full-cast audio plays. Produced by Big Finish Productions, **The Ninth Doctor Adventures** will consist of four boxsets, each containing three stories; they'll be released in May, August, and November 2021, and February 2022. This is exciting news, as Eccleston, who left the TV show after just one series in 2005, had long denied he'd ever return as the Doctor. Now that he's changed his mind, is the door open to him eventually returning for a TV special? Time will tell. | KM

THE POWERPUFF GIRLS

In one of the more attention-grabbing pieces of news these past few weeks, The CW is developing a gritty live-action series based on the beloved Cartoon Network show from Craig McCracken. Sure, that concept may rise an eyebrow or two, but one hugely encouraging element of this project is that Oscar-winning **Juno** scribe Diablo Cody is serving as Executive Producer. This new take will have Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup now in their 20s, disillusioned at having lost their childhoods to the hero game. When the world once more needs the Powerpuff Girls, the trio have to put their resentment behind them in order to team-up once more... | AP

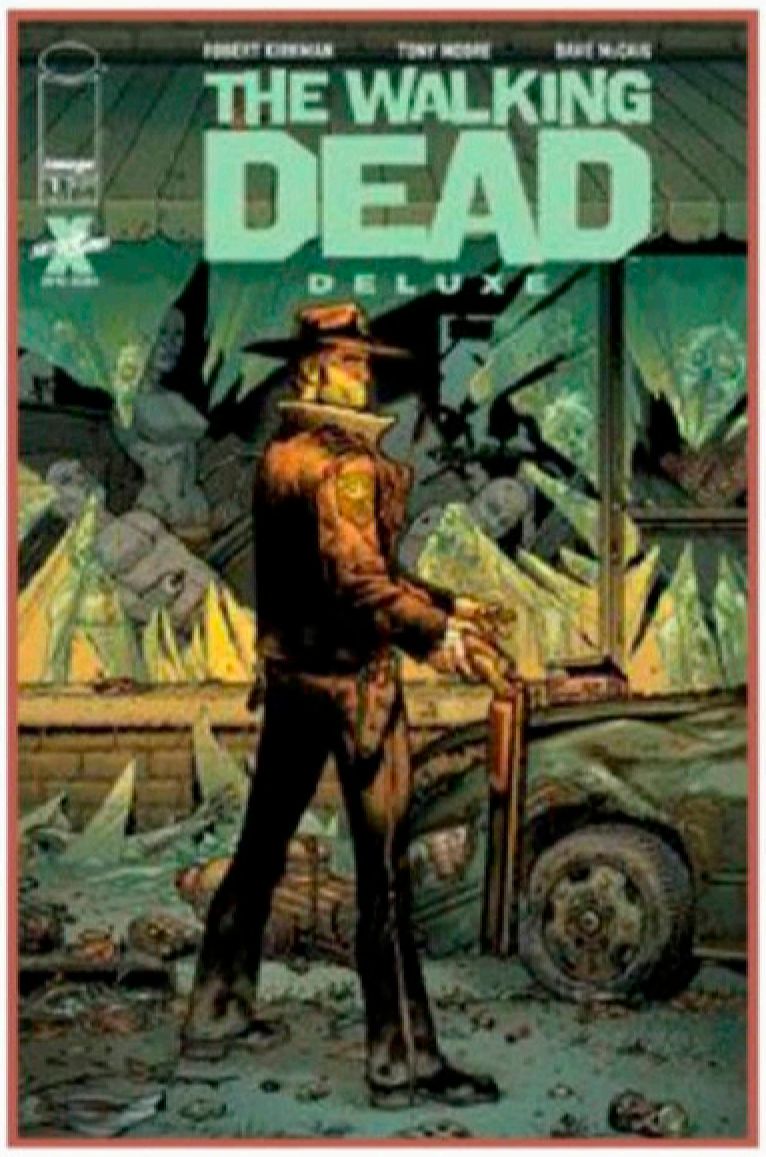
THE HAUNTED MANSION

The classic Disneyland attraction **The Haunted Mansion** is having a second stab at cinematic stardom following its poorly-received Eddie Murphy outing seventeen years ago. Proving she ain't afraid of no ghosts, Katie Dippold (co-writer of 2016's fun-but-ultimately-ill-fated **Ghostbusters** remake) is currently crafting the tale, which her Disney overlords are no doubt hoping will follow in the footsteps of their other dark-ride-turned-multiplex-money-spinner, **Pirates of the Caribbean**.

Another Eddie Murphy remake hitting the news recently is **The Nutty Professor**. Rather than subjecting us to a third round of fat-suit tomfoolery, new rights holders Project X (the studio behind the

View from THE WATCHTOWER

Greetings from the Watchtower, comic lovers! Not long after the world's most renowned comic convention - the San Diego Comic-Con - was cancelled for the first time in its 50-year history and replaced with a digital streaming event, Warner Bros announced huge layoffs that have gutted the editorial staff at DC comics. Following the merger of AT&T and Time Warner, the depressingly expected redundancies have hit both DC Comics and DC Universe hard and rumours suggest a third of the DC editorial staff have been let go. High profile casualties include Editor-in-Chief Bob Harris, Vice President of Global Publishing Initiatives Bobbie Chase, Senior Story Editor Brian Cunningham and Executive Editor Mark Doyle. It's worth noting that Doyle successfully oversaw the launch of DC's incredibly well received Black Label imprint and Bobbie Chase was responsible for the successful young adult graphic novel line. Therefore, many will be very surprised at these redundancies. Furthermore, the bad news continues as rumours abound that most of the staff of DC Universe streaming service have also been let go. However, many industry insiders were expecting this as their focus switched to the recently-launched HBO Max. In addition to the above, the previously announced huge DC 'Generation 5' roster relaunch - which would have seen a new timeline, many of the main characters being replaced by younger versions, reworking of Wonder Woman's origins an and expansion of Batman's timeline - has also apparently been cancelled.



Time to move onto some more upbeat stuff! It's not all bad news over at the home of Detective Comics, with the announcement that this October will see the release of a 12-issue series from writer Tom King and artist Jorge Fornes focusing on **Watchmen**'s Rorschach. With the last twelve months seeing the release of two high profile **Watchmen**-based properties (the excellent TV show and the comic book **Doomsday Clock**), many will probably be surprised at the announcement of another comic arc. However, with this particular creative team involved and the high quality of recent associated projects, this will no doubt be much anticipated.

Following the release of the **Negan Lives** one-shot in July comes the news that **The Walking Dead** will be re-released in colour! The much loved Kirkman/Adlard zombie epic will be coloured by Dave McCaig - rebranded **The Walking Dead Deluxe** - and will see two issues a month released starting from November. Furthermore, each issue will feature a 'Cutting Room Floor' section with hand-written plots and inside info from Robert Kirkman himself.

Finally, the last announcement this issue is a big one - Marvel's next epic, out of continuity story arc, **Dark Ages**. The premise sees a huge earthquake hit New York and the ensuing energy surge results in all technology failing. It soon becomes apparent that the disaster isn't confined to New York and the Marvel Universe has been thrust into a new Dark Age, and the world has no idea how or why...

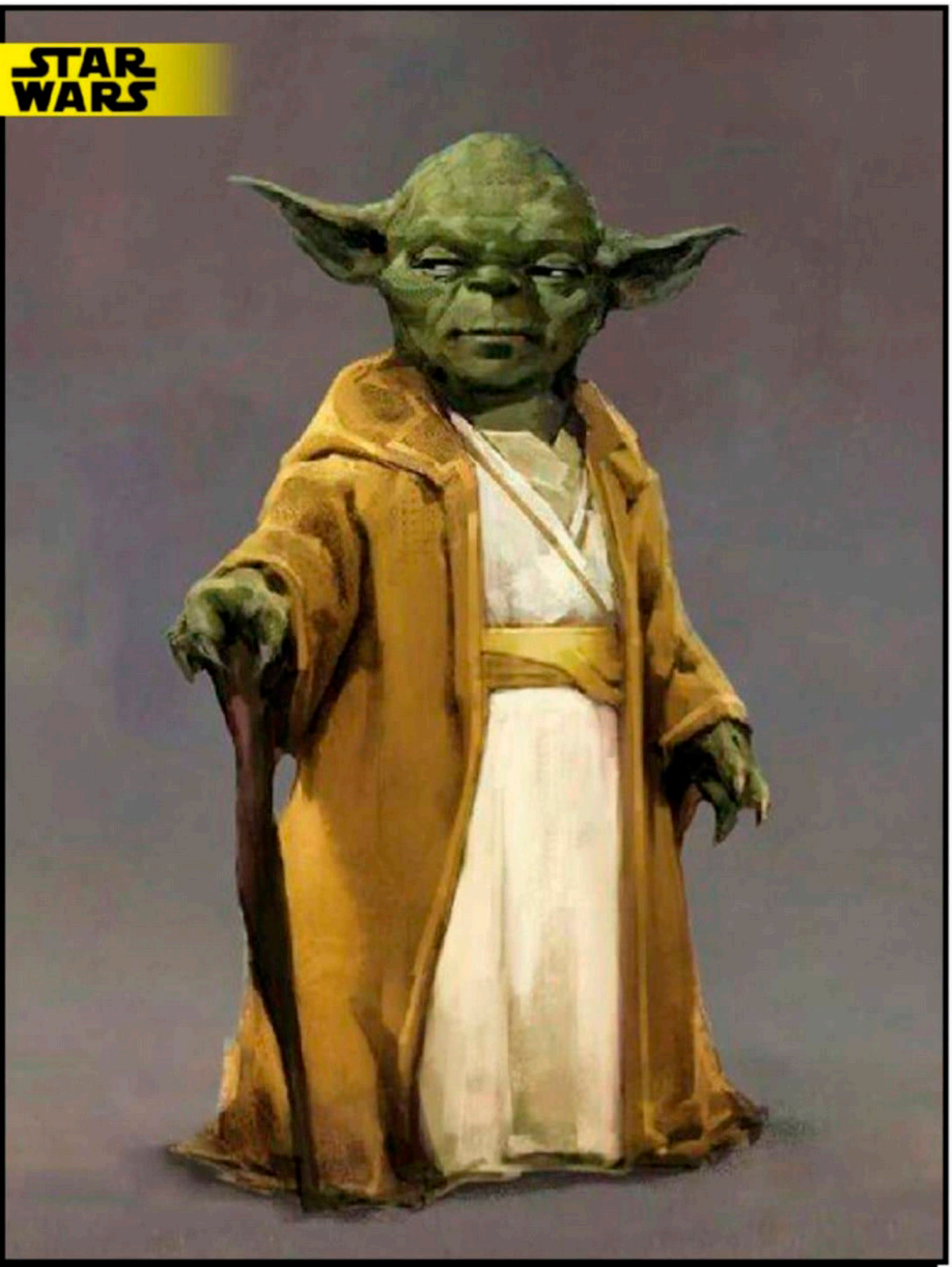
COMIC BOOK NEWS BY JAMES BRIDCUT

STAR WARS

In January 2021, a brand-new era in **Star Wars** storytelling begins. Set two hundred years before the Skywalker Saga launched in **The Phantom Menace**, the **High Republic** banner will tell tales of the Jedi Order at its peak, unaware that their peaceful times are about to be rocked by an act of hyperspace terrorism that heralds the arrival of a terrifying new threat to the galaxy. Novels, audiobooks, and comic series from Marvel and the more youngling-friendly IDW will be released each month (credits at the ready, readers!), but **TTC** wouldn't rule out live-action adventures set in this time period somewhere down the line. But never mind all that, who's the young thruster in the picture, we hear you ask? Well, you may be familiar with him as a 900-year-old Jedi Master, but this is actually our very first glimpse at Yoda himself, only as a 700-year-old Jedi Master! Naturally we're just being facetious – how different was our little green friend really going to look, after all – but we must admit, we didn't expect for him to be channelling some serious Samuel L. Jackson vibes! Is anybody else getting that? Just us?

Away from the High Republic, we now know we'll be returning to the lawless post-**Return of the Jedi** era of **The Mandalorian** on October 30th when Season 2 debuts on Disney+. Fingers crossed that you'll have seen a trailer by the time you're reading this, because imagery is as scarce as Beskar steel at the time of going to print!

With Ben Solo having passed over to the cosmic Force, Adam Driver's tenure in the galaxy far, far away is at an end, at least for now. It doesn't mean he's completely said goodbye to sci-fi cinema, however, and fans of the generously coiffed actor will be pleased to learn that he's lined up a major genre project produced by the legendary Sam Raimi himself. While the plot of the film – currently going under the title of **65** – is top secret for now, we do know that the brains behind it are our friends from Issue 471, Scott Beck and Bryan Woods, who will write and direct the picture for Sony. Having created the smash hit 2018 sci-fi horror **A Quiet Place**, it's perhaps apt that this is still on the hush-hush... | KH



recently announced **Scream 5**), have wisely chosen to wipe the slate clean and go the reboot route. Will anybody actually care? Third time's the charm. | KH

MARVEL

Olivia Wilde – who wowed last year with her directorial debut, **Booksmart** – has signed on to co-write and direct a mystery Marvel movie over at Sony. The specifics aren't known just yet on which character(s) will be the focus of the film, but it's been confirmed that the picture will be a female-fronted one. Already, many are speculating that this movie could be the Jessica Drew/Spider-Woman offering that Sony has been planning for several years, although we also know that Sony has plans to give solo films to fellow female characters such as Black Cat, Silver Sable, Silk, Jackpot, Madame Web, and possibly even Aunt May.

Elsewhere in the shared world that began with Tom Hardy's **Venom**, **Triple Frontier**'s J.C. Chandor has been brought in to helm Sony's **Kraven the Hunter**. Like Spider-Woman, Sony has long had plans to introduce Kraven to the big screen. One of Spider-Man's longest-serving villains, Sergei Kravinoff debuted way back in 1964 as the biggest of big game hunters. Complete with his enhanced instincts, extensive physical attributes, and elite level tracking skills, Kraven sees Spider-Man as the ultimate prize to add to his trophy collection – and he famously got the better of ol' Web-head in J.M. DeMatteis and Mike Zeck's stunning **Kraven's Last Hunt** arc back in 1987. Like Olivia Wilde's mystery movie, **Kraven the Hunter** has yet to be given a set release date by Sony. Up next for this shared realm, of course, is Jared Leto's **Morbius** and the eagerly anticipated **Venom: Let There**

Be Carnage, both of which have been pushed back to 2021 releases due to the current global situation. | AP

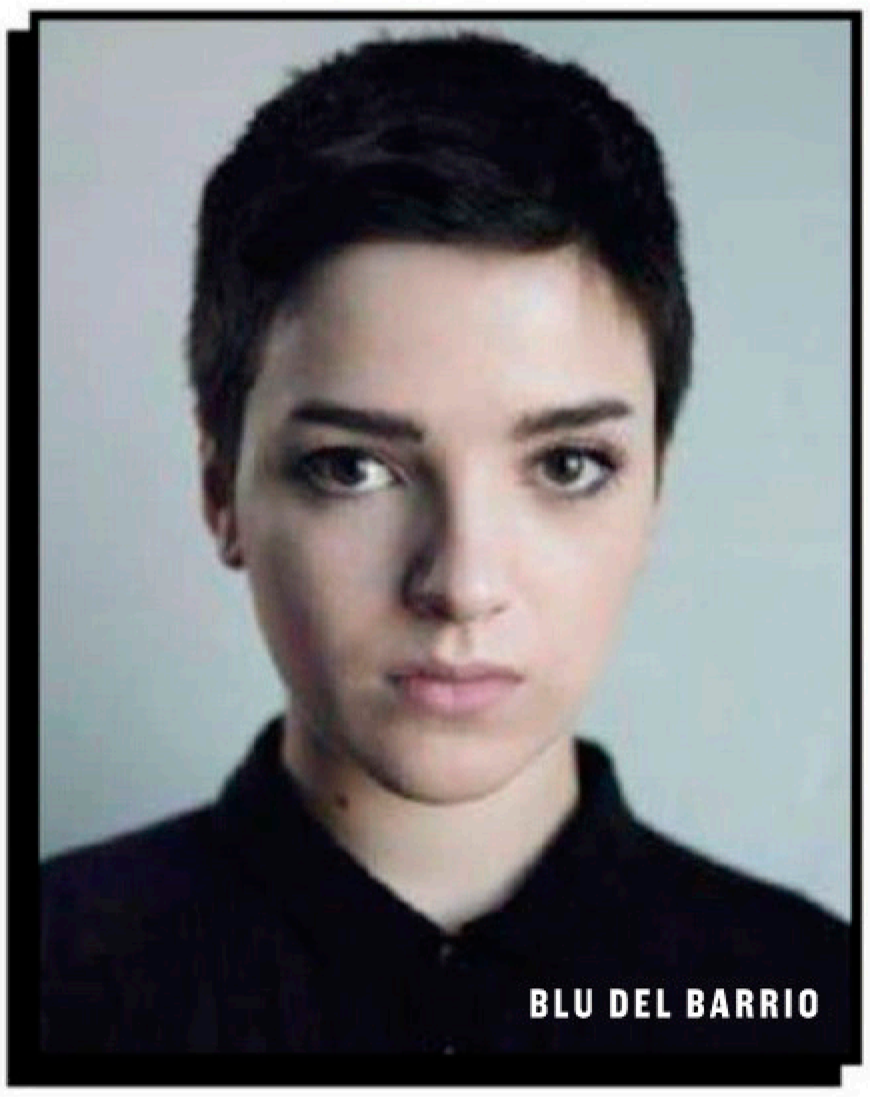
THE X-FILES

With the show having come to an end in 2018, the quest to find out if the truth really *is* out there will now continue in animated form. FOX has given a series order for a new comedy take on the property titled **The X-Files: Albuquerque**, which will focus on a B-team of agents who have to deal with the more crazy and ridiculous cases that are deemed too out-there for Murder and Scully to waste their time on. **The X-Files** creator Chris Carter is involved as an Executive Producer, with **Brickleberry** duo Rocky Russo and Jeremy Sosenko to write and serve as showrunners. | AP

STAR TREK

Lower Decks may be nearly through its US run, but at the time of writing we're frustratingly still awaiting a UK distributor to pick it up. Showrunner Mike McMahan has clarified that the delay is due to the show - originally set to air after Season 3 of **Discovery** - being brought forward, and agreements with international distributors weren't in place. These agreements are taking longer than usual due to the whole COVID-19 shitshow. Expect it to be picked up and arriving here soon though. It's pretty good!

The delayed third season of **Discovery** also has an airdate, arriving Stateside on October 15th, a week after **Lower Decks** finishes. The season will feature **Trek**'s first transgender and non-binary characters. New crewmember Adira is described as "*highly intelligent with a confidence and self-assurance well beyond their years.*" Initially suffering from amnesia, the introverted Adira finds a new home aboard Discovery. They're


BLU DEL BARRIO

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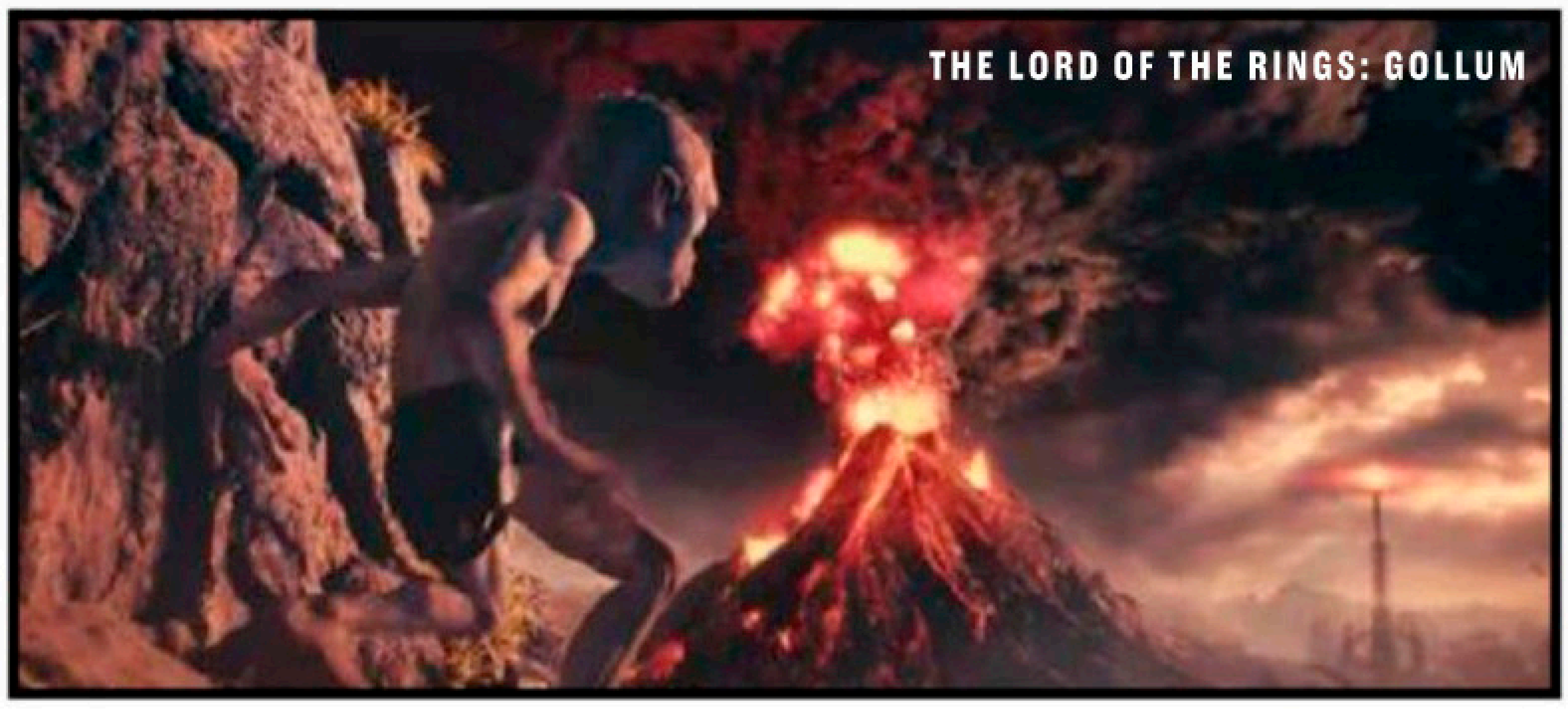

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: GOLLUM

Rocksteady, developers of the **Arkham** series, have unveiled they're working on a new game set in that universe, which they confirmed with a fun trailer during DC FanDome (more on which can be found in these very pages). The game, **Suicide Squad: Kill the Justice League**, doesn't have an exact release date yet, but we can expect it sometime in 2022. WB Montreal also revealed that its upcoming **Gotham Knights** will feature the entire batfamily as they investigate the Court of Owls. The developers have previous experience with the Batman franchise, as they developed **Arkham Origins**. The combat system looks like an evolution of the Arkham games so we're interested to see what the developer can pull off here.

Almost two years after we got a vague announcement that it was in development, we've finally heard a peep about **Dragon Age 4**. BioWare released a short video offering up some information and early gameplay footage about its fantasy RPG. Most of it focused on development insights though, and, similarly, we still don't have a solid release date in place. We can assume it's likely going to show up on the next generation of consoles.

We recently got hit with some nasty delay news recently too, with the upcoming **LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga** now getting pushed back to spring 2021. The game follows the plot of all nine main films from the Skywalker perspective, which means it takes in the story arcs of Anakin, Luke, Leia, and Rey. We at least know it's coming to both current and next-gen systems.

More worrying is the announcement of the delay of **Halo: Infinite**. Originally slated to be the Xbox Series X's big launch title, the game's now been pushed back to some point in 2021 so that 343 Studios can give it some extra spit and polish. The studio says that COVID-19 caused the delay, but we think that the fan backlash to the graphics we've seen so far might have also played a part. Regardless, this is a pretty big blow for Microsoft, which has just lost a killer launch app mere months before the release of the Xbox Series X.

In happier news, Daedalic Entertainment showed us a little bit more of what we can expect from **The Lord of the Rings: Gollum**. The game, which comes out next year on PS5, PC, and Xbox One, bears more than a passing resemblance to the **Prince of Persia** and **Assassin's Creed** games with its parkour-inspired antics. We're looking forward to seeing the legendary tale told from Gollum's perspective, as that's an avenue that hasn't really been explored yet.

And finally, we got the news that **Baldur's Gate 3** is coming to Steam's Early Access service at the end of September. This early version will apparently feature 600 characters and 80 combat situations, so it's practically a full game in its own right.

VIDEO GAME NEWS BY LEE PRICE

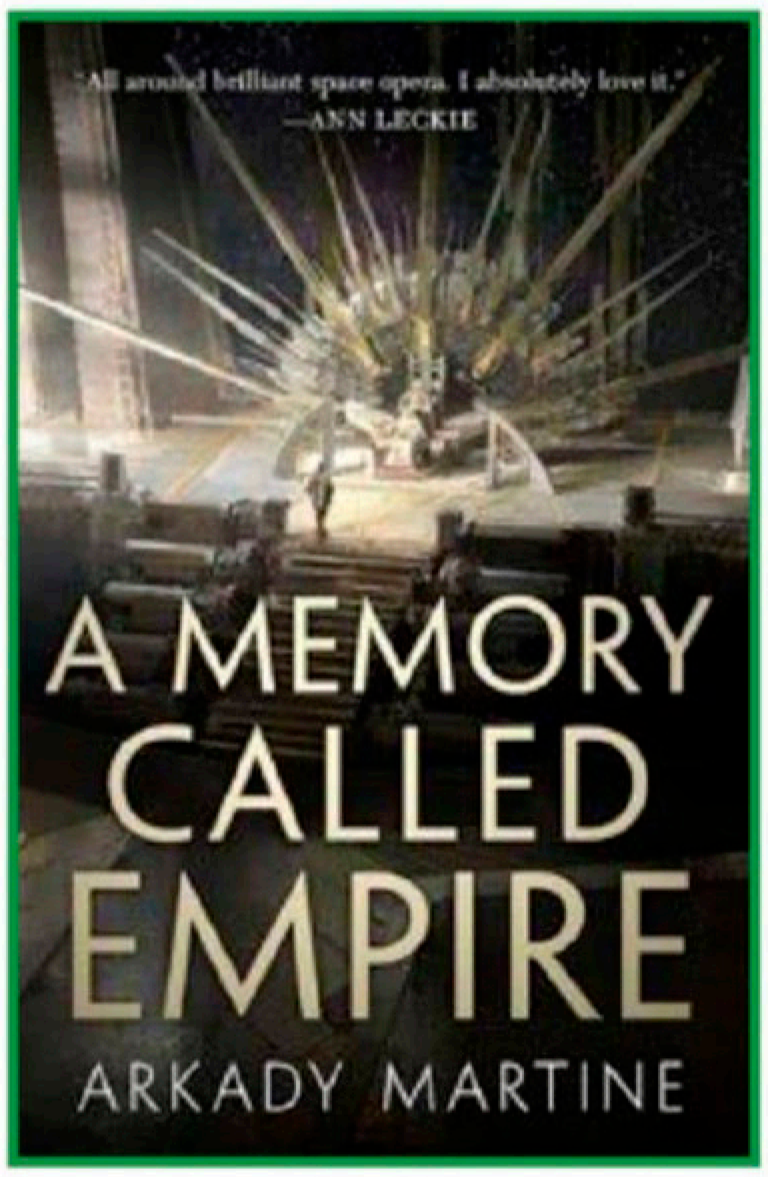
QUOTH THE RAVEN

Writers who happen to be both **Warhammer** and horror fans will be delighted to learn that publisher The Black Library will open their submissions window from October 19th - 31st. The themes are Survival, Psychological, Gothic, and Cosmic. Good Luck! If you're looking for a different sort of start, speculative fiction non-profit organisation The Dream Foundry have launched their short story contest 'for beginning professionals'; the deadline is October 11th. Full details of what 'beginning professional' means is on their website.

The University of Glasgow has launched the Centre for Fantasy and the Fantastic. Online lectures, available to the public, include speakers such as the acclaimed fantasy author Ellen Kushner, Terri Windling, Professor Brian Attebery, and Dr Robert Maslen.

The Gollancz and Rivers of London BAME SFF Award went to **The Principles of Moments** by Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson. The prize includes £4,000, a critique, and a year-long mentoring program with Gollancz editor Rachel Winterbottom.

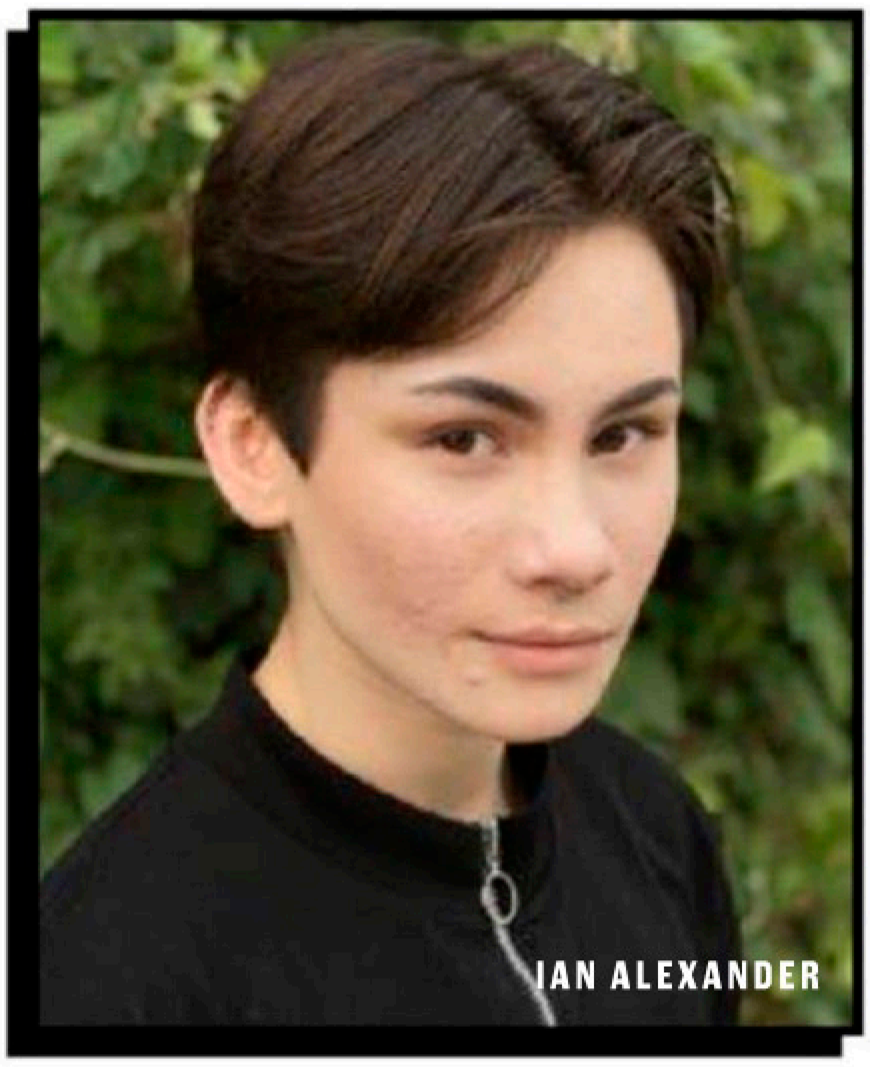
George R.R. Martin hosted this year's Hugo Awards, which was held entirely online due to COVID-19. From the comfort of his private cinema, Martin used the ceremony as a platform to snipe and snark at the changing face of science fiction. Martin repeatedly butchered the pronunciation of various nominees and winners, and took the time to lecture us all on Worldcon's long and boring history. He also kept bringing up the name of the late John W. Campbell, which is interesting because Campbell's name was removed from an award last year due to his association with extreme right-wing views. A version of the ceremony is available online with Martin's dullard antics removed. It's about two hours shorter. The winners included: Arkady Martine's **A Memory Called Empire** for Best Novel, **This is How You Lose the Time War** by Max Gladstone and Amal El-Mohtar won Best Novella, and Bogi Takács won Best Fan Writer.


"All around brilliant space opera. I absolutely love it." —ANN LECKIE
A MEMORY CALLED EMPIRE
ARKADY MARTINE

Conzealand, the 78th Worldcon, went extremely well considering it was mostly online; some of the programming was a little generic and this can be put down to the pressures of having to alter the entire convention at short notice. This year also had an unofficial side-thing called the Worldcon Fringe, a bunch of supplementary panels and talks that broadcast in UK time. It's all on YouTube and it's a great way to get a slice of what this pseudo-academic/deep geek convention is about.

Brisbane, Australia has launched a bid for the 2025 Worldcon. Chicago won the bid to host the 80th Worldcon in 2022. This will be the 8th time the North American-centric event has gone to Chicago. It beat the bid from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia easily with 517 bids to Jeddah's 33. Hoax write-in entries included Antarctica, Free Hong Kong, Moderately Expensive Hong Kong, New Zealand, Old Zealand, and Zeppelin Hangar. Jeddah will try again in for 2026. Israel is rumoured to be eyeing 2027 for its bid so Worldcon may become truly international.

LITERATURE NEWS BY ED FORTUNE


IAN ALEXANDER

played by newcomer Blu del Barrio, who describes the character as "*uniquely strange and beautiful.*" Blu del Barrio will be joined by 19-year-old Ian Alexander as Gray, a transgender Trill. The character is described as "*empathetic, warm and eager to fulfil his lifelong dream of being a Trill host, but he will have to adapt when his life takes an unexpected turn.*" Obviously, we don't know what that turn is yet, but Trill symbionts live a long time, and Dax could still be around... As for Alexander, they're already known to genre fans, having appeared in both **The OA** and **The Last of Us Part II.** Season 3 will also see the return of popular guest star Kenneth Mitchell. The actor, who suffers from ALS, played three Klingons in the first couple of seasons, including Kol, one of the first year's main villains, and Tenavik - the child of Tyler and L'Rell. This time around, he'll be spared the prosthetics, playing an as-yet unknown human character in the latter half of the season.

In case that's not enough new **Trek** for you, the formerly untitled Nickelodeon show now has an official name - **Star Trek: Prodigy**, and a director/co-executive producer in the form of Ben Hibon (**Codehunters**). He joins fellow EPs Kevin and Dan Hagemen on the show, which is now confirmed to debut next year (providing, of course, the world's still here in 2021 - the way things have gone this year, we're not optimistic).

Speaking of next year, it looks like that's when Season 2 of **Picard** will be shooting, as will the Pike-centric **Strange New Worlds.** Also, likely to shoot next year is the **Section 31** series with Michelle Yeoh. Despite things being relatively quiet with the series (as far as we know it's still not officially been ordered by CBS), **Trek** head honcho Alex Kurtzman has recently confirmed it's very much in development and won't be at all the show people expect. Although considering most people have already written it off, that's probably a good thing. The crowded production schedule is also likely to see

Season 4 of **Discovery**, which, although not yet officially confirmed, Kurtzman has revealed they're currently writing for.

Over in movie world, we're still very much in "what the hell's happening?" mode. The new head of Paramount's Motion Picture Group, Emma Watts has put the previously in-development movie from Noah Hawley (**Fargo**) on hold while they decide how to proceed. The fourth Kelvin movie, which would feature the return of Chris Hemsworth's George Kirk - which everyone assumed was as dead as the character - is now apparently under consideration once again. As is the Quentin Tarantino project, reportedly based on the classic **Original Series** episode *A Piece of the Action*. All three movies are potentially under consideration while Paramount decides which way to proceed with the movie franchise. Considering it's been four years since **Beyond**, we're very much in the "we don't care, just give us a new damn movie" camp.

Elsewhere, COVID-19 continues to be a pain in the ass, with the recent announcement that **Destination Star Trek Germany** has been postponed to 2021, with there being a good possibility that November's London version is set to follow suit. In happier news though, both **Picard** and **Short Treks** have been nominated for Emmy Awards. While **Picard**'s are all in the technical categories, **Short Treks** is up for 'Outstanding Short Form Comedy or Drama Series.' Considering **Trek** rarely gets nominated for anything non-technical, that's a pretty big deal.

Finally, it's farewell to Ben Cross. The actor played Spock's Father Sarek in 2009's **Star Trek.** He died in August, aged 72. | IR

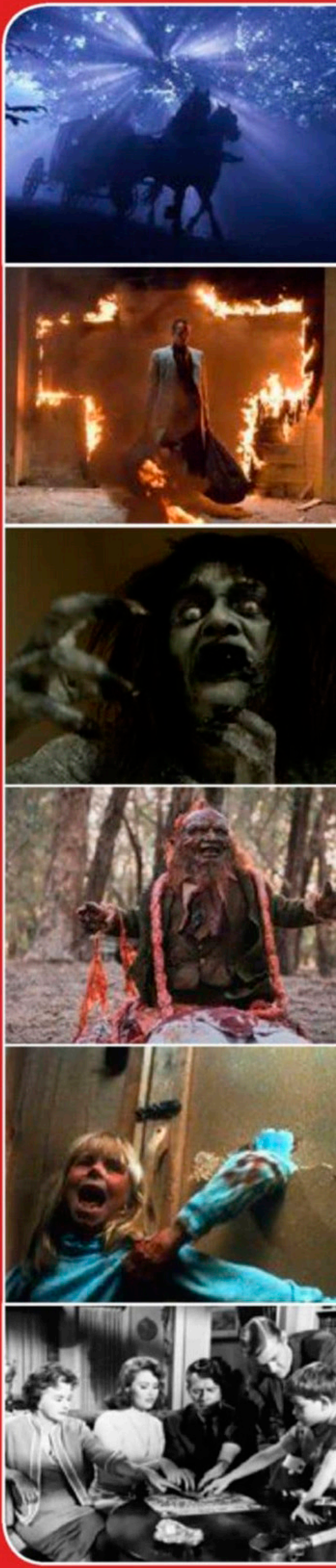
MOTHER/ANDROID

Coming full circle after opening this issue's TTC with news of **The Batman**, we'll close with this story relating to its co-writer Mattson Tomlin, who has added another enticing genre project to his burgeoning filmography. **Mother/Android** is an original story (remember them?) about two young, soon-to-be parents fleeing from the ravages of an A.I. uprising. Tomlin will pull double-duty to direct the deeply personal allegorical tale – based on his parents' experiences during the Romanian Revolution – with his buddy on **The Batman** Matt Reeves on hand to produce. Stepping into the lead role is the always great Chloë Grace Moretz, who returns to the world of live-action genre cinema following 2018's phenomenal **Suspiria** remake. | KH

Stories by ANDREW POLLAND, KRIS HEYS, IAIN ROBERTSON, and KIERON MOORE

A round-up of what not to miss this month on... horrorchannel

by Martin Unsworth



SEPTEMBER 20TH - AN AMERICAN HAUNTING (2005)

Based on the 'real-life' legend of the Bell Witch, this is a star-studded ghost story, headlined by Donald Sutherland and Sissy Spacek. Descendants of the original Bell family fall victim of the curse that plagued their ancestors.

SEPTEMBER 26TH - LEGION (2010)

Paul Bettany takes time off from being J.A.R.V.I.S. and Vision to play fallen archangel Michael, who relinquishes his wings and takes the side of the humans in an angelic war headed by his brother Gabriel (Kevin Durand). Adrianne Palicki is the mother of the saviour of humanity, and Dennis Quaid is along for the ride. It's preposterously crazy, but fun.

OCTOBER 17TH - ECHOES OF FEAR (2018)

After inheriting her grandfather's house, a woman has to face some horrifying spectres while she's trying to fix the place up. Edge-of-the-seat action and some good old jump scares are the order of the day! (UK TV premiere)

OCTOBER 18TH - LEPRECHAUN RETURNS (2018)

Ignoring all the other sequels, this entry - directed by Steven Kostanski of Astron-6 - sees Taylor Spreitler play the daughter of the character Jennifer Aniston played in the original. Linden Porco takes over from Warwick Davis as the gold-obsessed psychotic little fella this time as the tearing down of his house provokes the mayhem to continue.

OCTOBER 24TH - THE BROOD (1979)

David Cronenberg's body horror classic has Samantha Eggar and Art Hindle battling it out for the custody of their child while she's undergoing a psychological therapy (provided by Oliver Reed!) that involves letting go of emotions through changes in the body. It's Cronenberg, so you know it's going to get icky at some point. Unmissable.

OCTOBER 25TH - 13 GHOSTS (1960)

The master of the horror gimmick William Castle does it again with this whimsical spooky tale involving a devil-worshipping scientist who leaves his family his run-down house. It comes with a housekeeper (played by the Wicked Witch herself Margaret Hamilton), a pair of goggles, some buried treasure... oh, and some ghosts. They can only see them by wearing the goggles, which is what audiences had to do when this was screened in cinemas. They were given 3D-type viewers that allowed them to choose to see or wimp out and not see the spirits. It's a lot of fun.

For small screen thrills, **Star Trek** continues with episodes from **The Original Series** scheduled throughout the month, and **The Next Generation** reaches its fifth season. Season Four of **Sliders** hits the channel and the classic 1978 series **Battlestar Galactica** makes its debut on October 21st.

Horror Channel is available on Sky 317, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138, and TalkTalk 487

EVERYONE'S ENTITLED

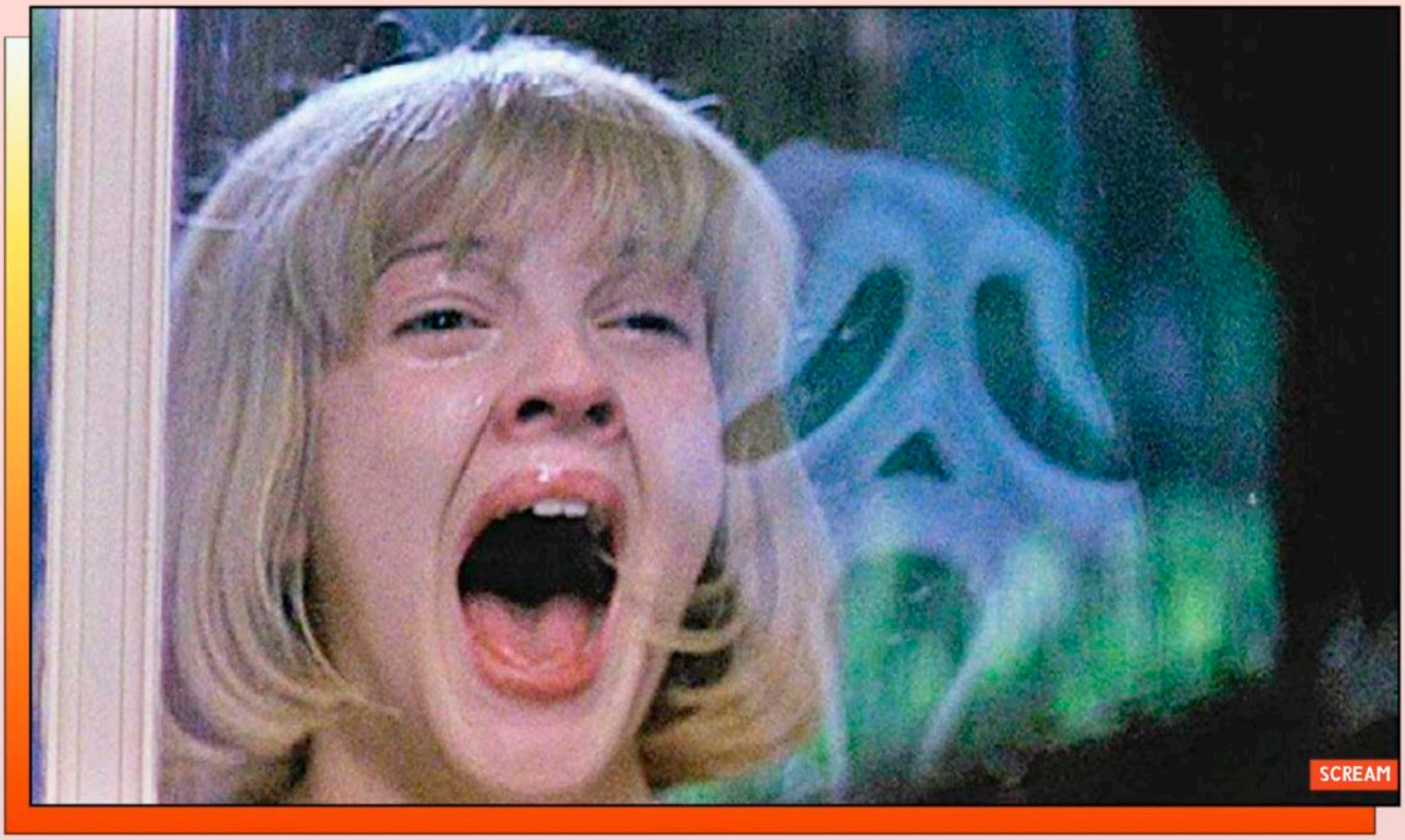
WITH SAMHAIN FAST APPROACHING, THE STARBURST TEAM HAVE ASSEMBLED AROUND THE CAMPFIRE TO SHARE 31 OF THEIR PERSONAL FAVOURITE SCREEN SCARES, ONE FOR EVERY DAY OF THE HALLOWEEN SEASON...

THE HAUNTING

'SOMEBODY'S AT THE DOOR'

THE HAUNTING (1963)

Picture if you will a stormy October night in the year 1980. An impressionable ten-year-old sits frozen in fear as he witnesses two nightgown-clad women screaming in terror because some unknown entity is frenziedly pounding upon their bedroom door. The film was Robert Wise's *The Haunting*, based upon Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House*. Exteriors were filmed at Ettington Park in Warwickshire, just down the road from that ten-year-old. The aforementioned scene is a masterclass of 'less is more'. There are no gimmicks or effects to ratchet up the tension, just a terrifying use of sound, sudden extreme close-ups, and disorientating camera angles. The scene begins simply enough. Eleanor (Julie Harris) and Theo (Claire Bloom) are awakened by eerily loud footsteps. The footsteps stop outside their room, the doorknob turns painfully slowly, then the frenzied pounding starts. Then it abruptly stops while the camera follows the door frame in a crazy zig-zag movement.


SCREAM

TO ONE GOOD SCARE

Suddenly the pounding resumes before reaching a crescendo with a woman's maniacal laughter retreating from the door. Forty years later, I still jump at a door slamming and I'm content to let whatever walks at Hill House, walk alone. | CHRISTIAN JONES

'CASEY BECKER'S FINAL MOMENTS'

SCREAM (1996)

I first saw *Scream* with my uni housemates on its original release, with no idea what to expect. I knew it was supposedly fantastic; that it was a post-modern horror comedy (whatever that meant) directed by the great Wes Craven - creator of one of my then-favourite horrors, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. I was expecting to love it, I wasn't expecting to have the crap scared out of me within the first ten minutes. The opening scene - where Drew Barrymore's Casey Becker is stalked by a largely unseen killer - perfectly sets the tone for the rest of the movie. Mixing scares and laughs, it's a horror where the characters have seen the same movies and know the rules just as well as the audience, expertly handled by a re-energised Craven. He ramps up the tension from the initial, flirtatious tone of the calls, right through to their horrific conclusion. The opening's impact has been lessened by assorted sequels, spoofs (including *Stab, Scream 2's* film-within-a-film recreation) and the renaissance in slashers *Scream* inspired. But I remember the nervous gasps from the audience, and us walking home from the cinema late at night, flinching at the slightest sound, and raving over our new favourite scary movie. | IAIN ROBERTSON

'THE PARENTS RETURN'

THE GATE (1987)

There are quite a few terrifying moments in *The Gate* – the construction worker buried in the wall, anyone? – but the single most terrifying point in the film is so brief as to feel like you might've imagined it. It certainly destroyed my world when I first saw it at 10 or 11. Imagine sitting in a friend's living room, eating junk food, and watching this for a sleepover. You relate to the story of friends Terry (Louis Tripp) and Glen (Stephen Dorff), because they're your age and how cool is that! You're surprised by the 'light as a feather, stiff as a board' bit, spooked by a dead dog and demonic arms from under the bed, but you're having fun. Then Glen's parents come home early from their trip, and when Glen goes running to them, a demonic voice says, *"You've! Been! Bad!"* As Glen is lifted up by the throat, he reaches for his father's face and it melts. Not waxy crayon melting like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, but pouring goo that leaves the eye sockets looking like a rotten pumpkin and splattering on the concrete. 20 seconds, and you're scarred for life. | NICK SPACEK

THE GATE

HALLOWEEN III: SEASON OF THE WITCH

'THE TEST ROOM'

HALLOWEEN III: SEASON OF THE WITCH (1982)

The third *Halloween* movie is an underrated horror classic thanks in part to a plot written by Nigel Kneale and some memorable moments that mix skin-crawling weirdness with gore. The plot revolves around a sinister conspiracy to sacrifice thousands of American children to ancient pagan gods. It's close to Halloween and every child wants to own a 'Silver Shamrock' mask, mostly thanks to a very catchy jingle that accompanies their television advertising. Which brings us to The Test Room scene. An unsuspecting All-American couple sit in a simulated front room with their young boy. The TV blares the cheerful Silver Shamrock song. The parents scoff and play with their food while the little lad puts on his mask because the advert says he'll get a 'special surprise'. The child starts dancing, then twitching. Then his head caves in, melted

screaming rock and roll

IT FOLLOWS

by the mask's evil technology. Vermin pours out of the corpse, which kills the family, as a jaunty tune plays on. You will never forget the words Silver Shamrock. Children of the '80s may well have seen this on a television set very similar to the one in the ill-fated Test Room and if you happened to be the sort of kid who wanted everything advertised on TV, this one will have hit home! | ED FORTUNE

'THE GIANT MAN GETS A BIG REVEAL'

IT FOLLOWS (2014)

David Robert Mitchell's masterpiece gave audiences an abundance of unique and haunting scares throughout its 107-minute runtime, but none as surprising and downright memorable as the Giant Man that waltzes into Jay's room as she lets in her friend Yara. It's arguably the most terrifying form that 'It' takes, with his gargantuan 7"7' stature and blacked out eyes as he appears suddenly from the shadowy hallway behind young Yara, startling Jay into a frenzy as she attempts to escape his clutches. The man portraying this giant was the late Mike Lanier, who sadly passed away in 2018, aged 48. He was one half of the world's tallest twins and will forever be etched in history with this small but hugely important role easily being one of the most shocking and terrifying on-screen moments in horror. Another element that makes this scare so perfect is the accompanying sting from the haunting and masterful score by Disasterpiece. Mitchell's direction, Lanier's presence, and Disasterpiece's score all combine to create one of the best scares from one of the best horror films of the last decade. | JAMES PERKINS

'FINALLY COMING FACE-TO-FACE WITH A CRAWLER'

THE DESCENT (2005)

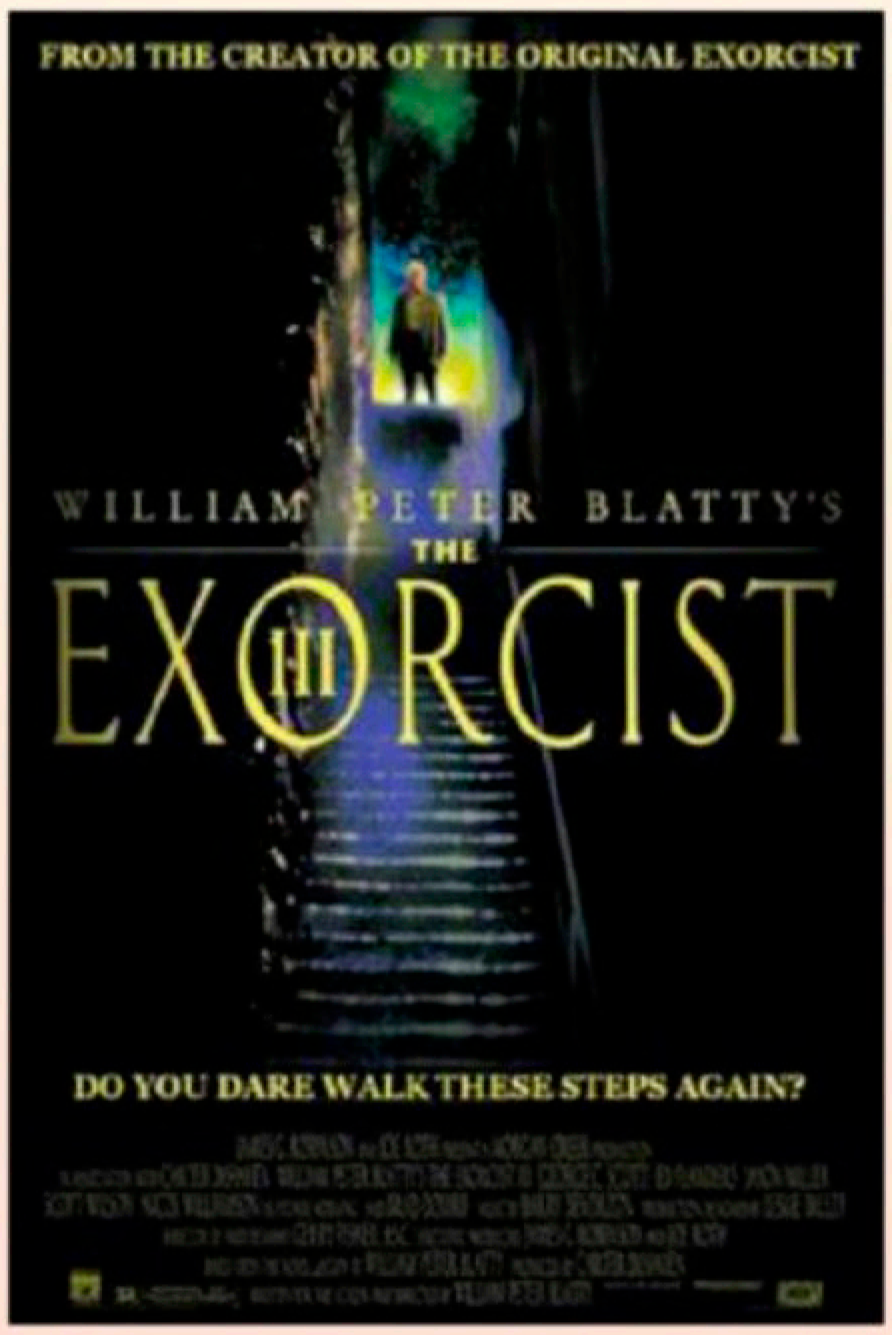
Some of the best horror films and, by association, those with the most terrifying scenes, are the ones that surprise you. Neil Marshall's *The Descent* is one such movie. Following a group of women exploring an unknown cave system, Marshall is not content with simply unsettling his audience through a creeping sense of desperation brought on by intense claustrophobia. Oh, and there are monsters down here as well, and some pretty damn unpleasant ones. The film's most intense scene, and there are a few contenders, is when the audience and the characters first encounter the humanoid horrors. Lost, increasingly scared, and with relationships strained, the group discover they are not alone in one unforgettable scene. Marshall carefully builds dread; unclear glimpses of something in the shadows, a tunnel collapse, and a serious injury. But in the next scene the camera swings round and you finally see the creature. Without doubt, *The Descent* is one of the finest, most absorbing horror films this century and this first look at a 'crawler' is unforgettable. For shear discomfort, for squirming terror, and for encapsulating a deep-rooted fear many of us share, Marshall's movie is without peer. | JOHN TOWNSEND

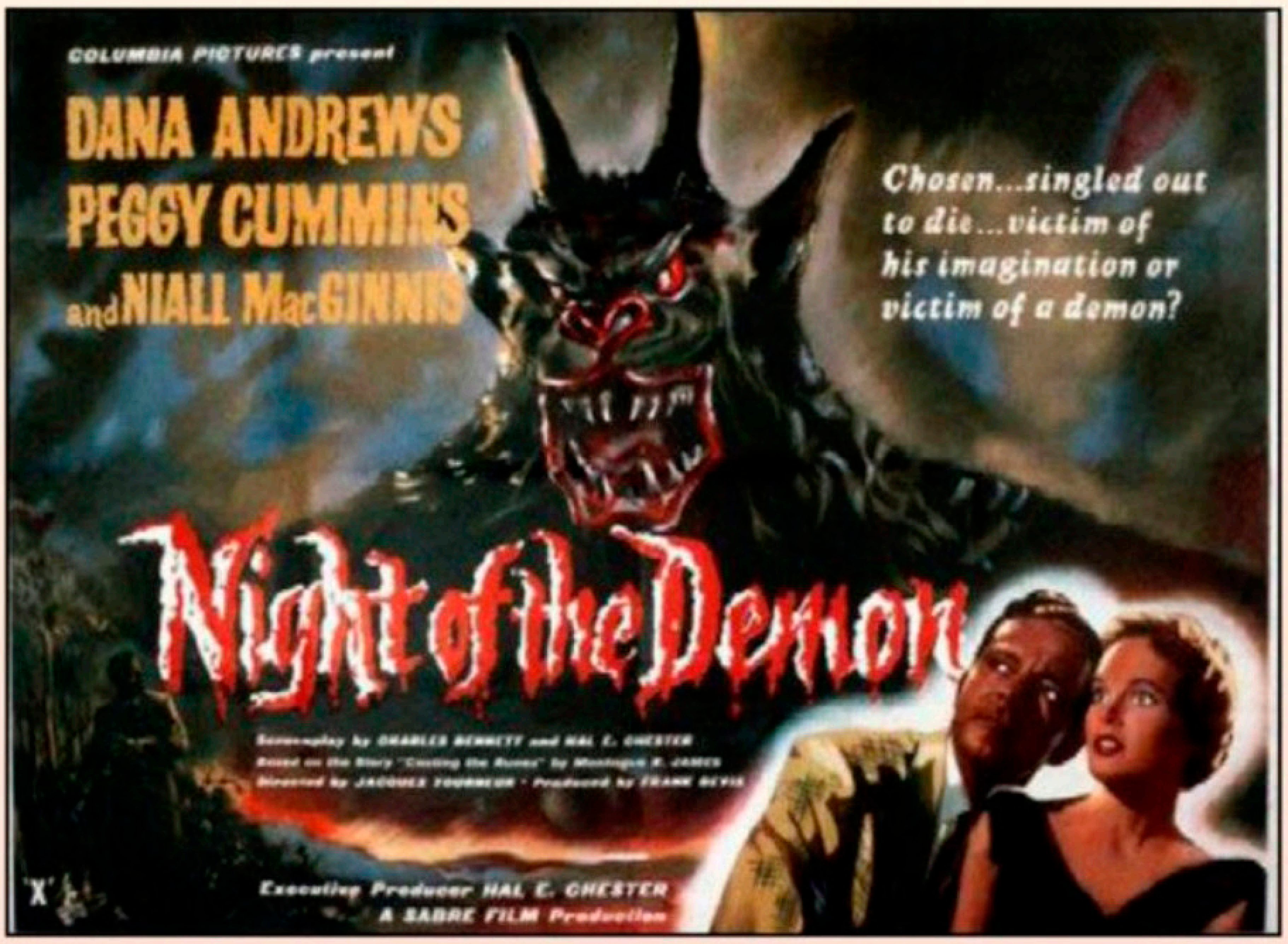
'OFELIA MEETS THE PALE MAN'

PAN'S LABYRINTH (2006)

Seen at any age, Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* is a haunting, brutally violent, mournful fantasy. Seen as a child, its story is utterly terrifying and tragic in a way you can't yet fully understand. However, as a child or an adult, one thing remains the same: in its physicality, actions, and in what it represents, the Pale Man is capital 'S' Scary. Looking back, the memory of its red eyes nestled into clawed, white hands has become conflated with the memory of everything Ofelia was fleeing from. It's a testament to the scarring impact the Pale Man had on this then-10-year-old that, checking back, his appearance clocks in at under five minutes. It's also fitting that for all the fear it inspires, the Pale Man's evil *pales* in comparison to that of del Toro's true antagonist, Captain Vidal. It is him that Ofelia seeks to escape, a man whose beliefs and actions are more horrifying than any demonic monster conjured by a child's imagination. As the director himself since stated, "*the Pale Man represents all institutional evil feeding on the helpless. It's not accidental that he is a) pale b)*

THE DESCENT


FROM THE CREATOR OF THE ORIGINAL EXORCIST
WILLIAM PETER BLATTY'S
THE
EXORCIST III
DO YOU DARE WALK THESE STEPS AGAIN?


COLUMBIA PICTURES present
DANA ANDREWS
PEGGY CUMMINS
and NIALL MacGINNIS
Chosen...singled out to die...victim of his imagination or victim of a demon?
Night of the Demon
'X'
Executive Producer HAL E. CHESTER
A SABRE FILM Production

a man." After all, the most frightening monsters are the ones that are still there when the screen goes dark. | LAURA POTIER

'THE NURSE SCENE'

THE EXORCIST III (1990)

When *The Exorcist* writer, William Peter Blatty, decided that the world needed a third instalment of the saga, there was a collective sigh. *Exorcist II: The Heretic* was widely regarded as one of the worst movies ever made. Even Richard Burton couldn't rescue that hokey locust fest. To everyone's surprise, however, *The Exorcist III* had a great atmosphere and cast, with a narrative that reeled you in. So far, so good. Then we got one hour and twelves minutes in, and we were treated to a cinematic masterclass commonly known as 'The Nurse Scene'. A simple corridor sequence in a hospital unfolds with security guards and a nurse all slowly going about their nightly business. Throughout the five-minute scene, the atmosphere builds without giving away any hint of the event to come. The compelling nature of the footage makes you unable to look away. After a false jump scare, the nurse returns to her desk, as a figure in white cloth suddenly marches across the corridor behind her, armed with amputation shears, level with her neck. A cacophony of screams and a cut to a headless statue of Christ confirms the worst. Despite multiple watches, this scene remains as potent as ever. | JORDAN ROYCE

'THE HAND ON THE STAIR RAIL'

NIGHT OF THE DEMON (1957)

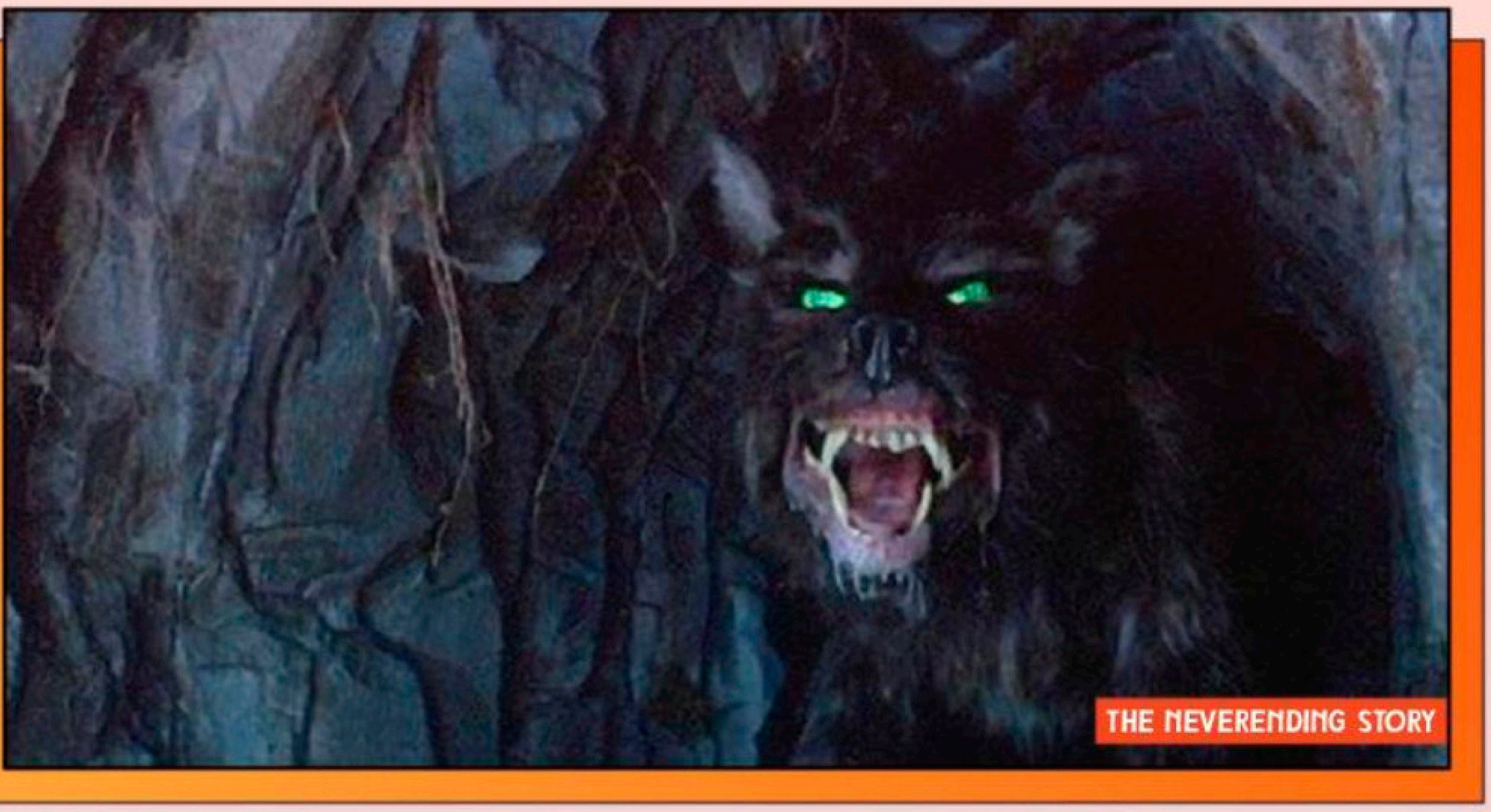
Night of the Demon is a very old film. It's black and white and grainy, the hero is a bit two dimensional, it starts with a really shonky bit of special effects that really wants cutting, and it also has an inexcusable bit of white person playing an Indian national, which really can't be cut because it's essential to the plot but... ick. Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that it comes from a different age, before horror had honed its art. But somehow, without knowing the tropes to come, through its overall sense of eerie dread and suspense, it contains one of the most effective jump scares I've ever experienced. This jump scare isn't a murder. It's not a monster. It's not the scream of a startled heroine or a sudden flash of movement. It's just a hand coming into frame. To settle on a banister. That's it. That's all. The protagonists don't even know it's there to react to it but, when I first saw it, well into the 21st century with an audience of seasoned cinemagoers, we all jumped out of our f****ing skin. At a hand. Settling on a banister. Sometimes that's all it takes. | SPLEENY DOTSON

'BEHOLD, THE BEAST OF DARKNESS!'

THE NEVERENDING STORY (1984)

They say you never forget your first. Mine chilled me to my soul – and definitely upstaged the rest of primary school. *The NeverEnding Story* was wheeled in on one of those massive tellies that took up the whole of the library every wet breaktime. Sound turned up over the storm outside, I discovered not only the compelling and overwhelming message of the story within a story within a story: that there was no

PAN'S LABYRINTH


THE NEVERENDING STORY

TIMESLIP

limit to the scope and power of human imagination, but within it the potential for terror. To this day, mention scary images and the first thing in my mind is the scene where our hero Atreyu finally meets the 'Beast of Darkness', G'mork. From within a collapsing wall, he watches with all-too-human green eyes and bloodied jaws, recounting the story so far as the world falls around them. G'mork tells Atreyu of his pursuit, Atreyu declares who he is and, enraged, the beast springs for him. We don't see his death, and the animatronic twitching when we cut back isn't what stayed with me. It's the cruel stillness in the eyes before anything happens at all. That never, ever left me. | RACHEL KNIGHTLEY

'DR JOYNTON OVERDOSES'

TIMESLIP (1970)

ITV's memorably prescient children's series *Timeslip* ran for 26 episodes across 1970 and 1971 and was generally more concerned with the use and abuse of science and how 'science-run-amok' could have grim consequences for both society and the individual. It wasn't much concerned with scaring the living daylights out of its young audience – with one notable exception. In the second serial 'Time of the Ice Box', teen time travellers Liz (Cheryl Burfield) and Simon (Spencer Banks) pitch up at a scientific research establishment in the frozen Antarctic in 1990. The Ice Box appears to be primarily concerned with experiments on a revolutionary longevity drug and the show's teatime fans – naming no names – were scared witless when, at the end of Episode Ten of the series the base's matronly Dr Edith Joynton (Peggy Thorpe-Bates), looking good for a woman well into her second century, collapses when the base's computer mismanages her dose of the drug. The end of the episode, showing Dr Joynton sprawled on the floor, now a wizened, emaciated corpse, was enough to send kids screaming up to their bedrooms, their plate of fish fingers and chips congealing on a table next to the TV. Apparently. They don't make kids TV like that anymore... | PAUL MOUNT

'THE HEAD'

JAWS (1975)

It's a misty night, where the spotlights barely cut through the gloom, and Hooper and Brody are on a boat, searching for evidence that the wrong shark has been caught. They happen across Ben Gardner's boat and prior to towing it in, Hooper decides to check out the hull.

Under the surface, the darkness is even more suffocating as Hooper descends and shines his torch on the gaping hole in the wooden boat and prises a large white tooth from the damaged area. To put you on edge, the theme music starts quietly in the background and Hooper gazes around, before turning back to the hull to investigate further, only for Ben's decapitated and water-bloated head to drift out of the hole and stare straight back him.

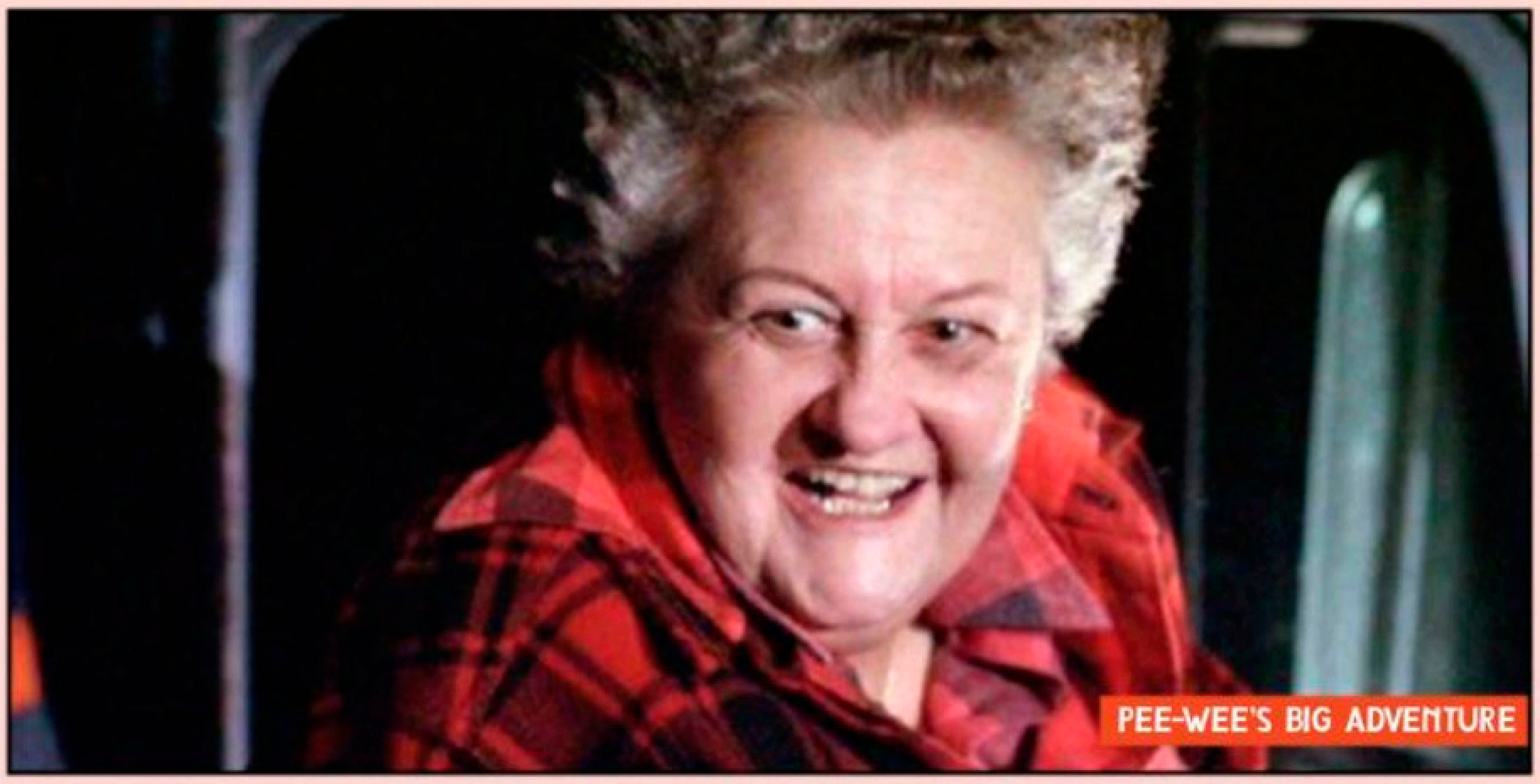
Has there been a better jump scare in cinematic history? Every single set up of this scene is perfect in making you think that Hooper is going to see the shark, but instead just pushes a human head out of a hole. That's it, and to think that arguably the scariest scene in *Jaws* was reshot in post-production in editor Verna Field's swimming pool! | JD GILLAM

'LARGE MARGE'

PEE-WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE (1985)

"On this night, ten years ago... I saw the worst accident I ever seen." So begins the stuff of childhood nightmares, courtesy of Pee-wee Herman. It was one of my favourites growing up, but there's one scene in particular that absolutely terrified me: Pee-wee's late-night ride with the super-creepy 'Large Marge'. Stranded, he hitchhikes and gets picked up by an articulated lorry. The driver, a pale-faced, crazy-eyed woman with hair shooting

JAWS



PEE-WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE

THE BABADOOK

everywhere, launches into a scary story about a horrible accident she witnessed. Things take a horrifying turn when Marge describes the dead body, telling a riveted Pee-wee that it looked "*just like this!*" before turning and giving him one of the most monstrous faces ever, eyes bugged out beyond belief. I would 'gear up' for this moment, hands positioned just under my eyes so I could quickly cover them in time. To make matters worse, when he finally makes it to the nearest service station and tells them "*Large Marge sent me*", everyone turns towards him in shock. Marge isn't just your average lorry driver, she's actually the victim of the very accident she described, and Pee-wee's just gotten a ride from her ghost! | VANESSA BERBEN

'THE NIGHT-TIME VISIT'

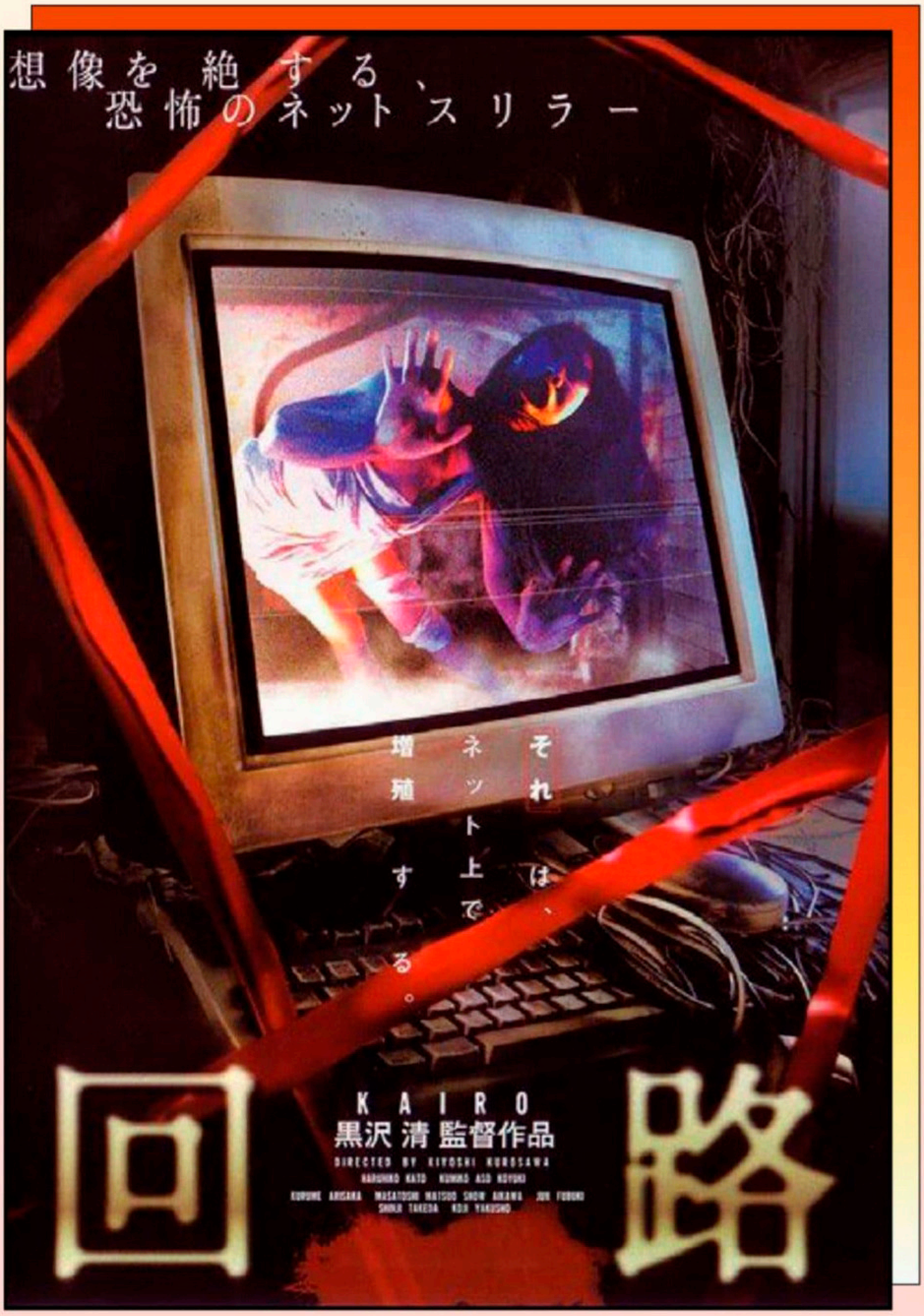
THE BABADOOK (2014)

Over the years there have been many sequences and scenes that have chilled me to the bone, whether it be from a '70s classic like *The Omen* (the first film to really scare me) or modern tales such as *Paranormal Activity.* While these are great films, many are unfairly written off as simple cheesy hokum and some of the metaphors and themes seemingly go unappreciated. However, in recent years, there has been a renaissance in the horror genre and the mindless so-called 'torture porn' films that dominated the '00s have been replaced by a slew of more 'cerebral' works. Whether it be the films of Jordan Peele or Ari Aster, horror finally seems to be receiving the critical acclaim it deserves. One such film is *The Babadook.* While the movie is a domestic drama about a grieving widow named Amelia (played by an excellent Essie Davis) who must raise her 6-year-old son, it is also a really scary horror film too. One of the most effective scenes sees the titular Babadook terrorise an emotionally drained Amelia in her bedroom at night. While the use of sound, darkness, and framing to create tension may not be anything new, the combination of great performances from its actors and a genuinely original, twitchy and eerie bogeyman results in a horrendously suspenseful scene that still sends chills through all who dare watch it. | JAMES BRIDCUT

'HELP ME'

PULSE (2001)

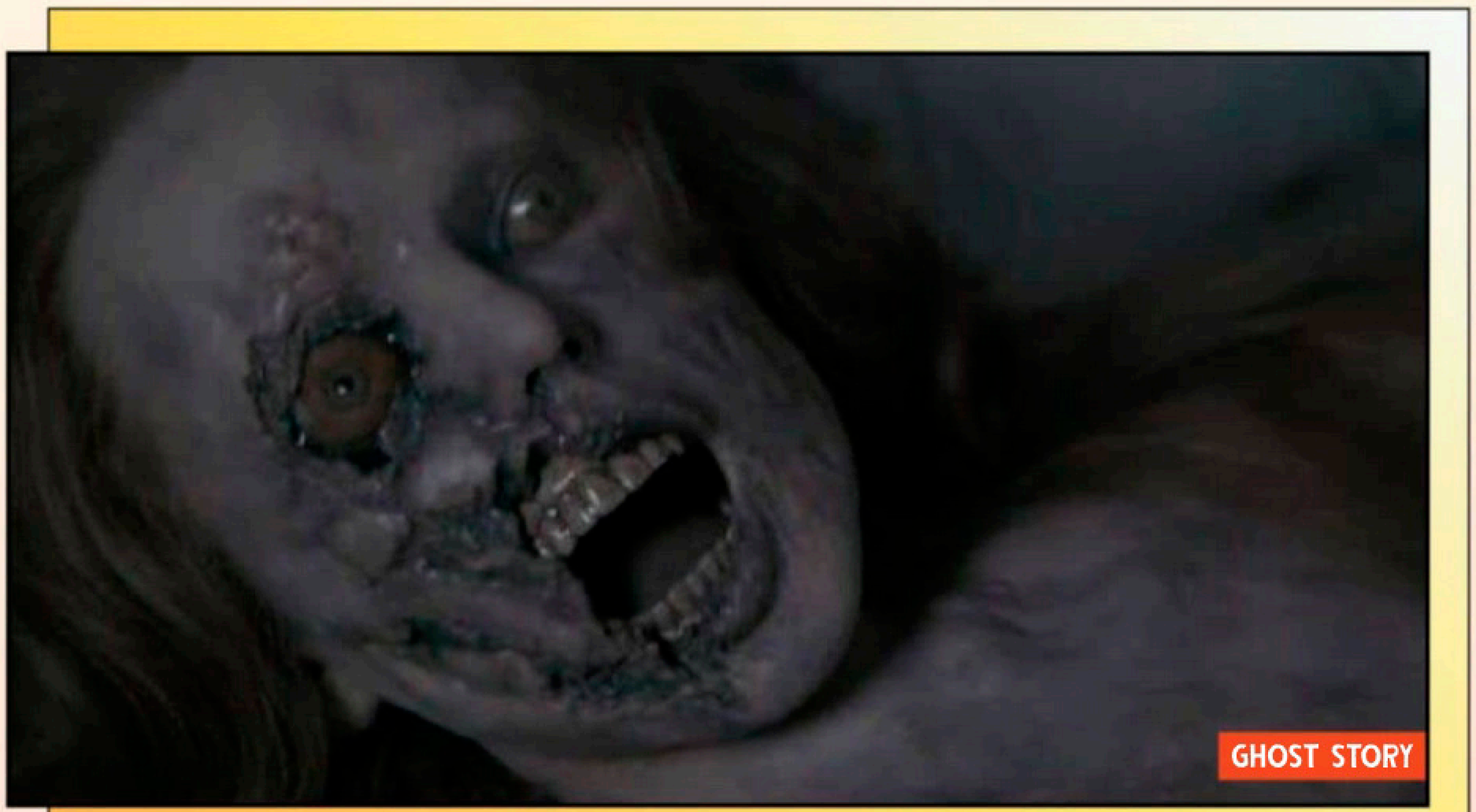
Though I'd be lying if I said the film worked for me as an overall whole, *Pulse* (aka *Kairo*) is an admirably eerie exploration of the sense of deep, existential dread that accompanies true loneliness. Released in 2001, the film was incredibly prescient, offering a haunting metaphor for our contemporary obsession with social media while most of us were still on dial-up connections. As silly as it sounds, the plot boils down to ghosts haunting the Internet, leading to a pandemic of people being consumed by the spirit-world. Roughly halfway through the film, we enter a room to see a character, stood in shadow by the wall. Happy to see him, the protagonist rushes over, only to find a damp, humanoid patch where, seconds ago, he was stood. As well-crafted as it is, what makes it a truly unnerving sequence is the sound mix. The white-noise in the background suddenly cuts out, leaving pure silence. You're so unprepared to hear true, unpolluted nothingness in a film that being confronted with it puts you completely on edge. And then, like some sort of evil ASMR video, crisp, ghostly whispers begin puncturing the void with the repeated plea of "*help me*". It's utterly terrifying. | SOL HARRIS


想像を絶する、
恐怖のネットスリラー
それは、ネット上で増殖する。
KAIRO
黒沢 清 監督作品
DIRECTED BY KIYOSHI KUROSAWA
回路

'EVA'S CORPSE'

GHOST STORY (1981)

Ghost Story is an eighties classic about a group of old men in New England who are haunted by the spirit of Eva Galli (the always terrifying Alice Krige), whom they killed many years earlier by accidental drowning. The film is definitely rife with jump scares, all manifesting as cold and damp, just like Eva's death. Her spirit kills these men and their family members, each time taking on a more hideous and haunting appearance than the last. The final scare is a twofer: as the remaining elder man, Ricky Hawthorne (Fred Astaire), rushes to free Eva's corpse from the submerged car in which it is lodged, the son of another, Don Wanderley (Craig Wasson), has a dramatic final showdown with Eva's spirit. The spirit, eager for the romance she was denied, manifests wearing a



GHOST STORY

CHIMERA

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

wedding dress, and taunts Don about his family's legacy before her veil is lifted, and she is revealed as utterly hideous and decayed. Meanwhile, Ricky releases Eva's corpse from the car, and at first it seems to claw at him, before falling on its back, at which point its soft tissues collapse, and its skin falls off like wet cloth. These final two scares, coming on the heels of a movie filled with jump scares of increasing horror, will certainly test your nerves for many nights to come. | ALEC FRAZIER

'CHAD READS RUPERT THE BEAR'

CHIMERA (1991)

A terrifying human/monkey hybrid escapes from a shady fertility clinic and finds refuge in an old barn where he's befriended by two children. Not clearly shown to viewers until halfway through the third of four episodes, his big reveal comes in the children's bedroom as the camera pans upwards from a floor covered with shredded comics to show the creature quietly studying a Rupert the Bear annual. He turns to the camera with a grimace (think of the lad from the start of the first *Resident Evil* game), and snarls as the screen fades to black. To kids who were definitely too young to be watching, that stripy Freddy Krueger jumper-wearing monstrosity could quite feasibly have appeared in *your* bedroom at any time without warning and torn shit up for no good reason. It'd be months before the bedside light could be turned off at night again... Even today, seeing his grotesque features being unveiled in such an innocent location is massively unsettling. But at least now we can chuckle about how it's just a man in a rubber suit that looks like a cross between Keith Richards and the lady in the library from Ghostbusters. | CHRIS JACKSON

'THE PHANTOM'S UNMASKING'

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (1925)

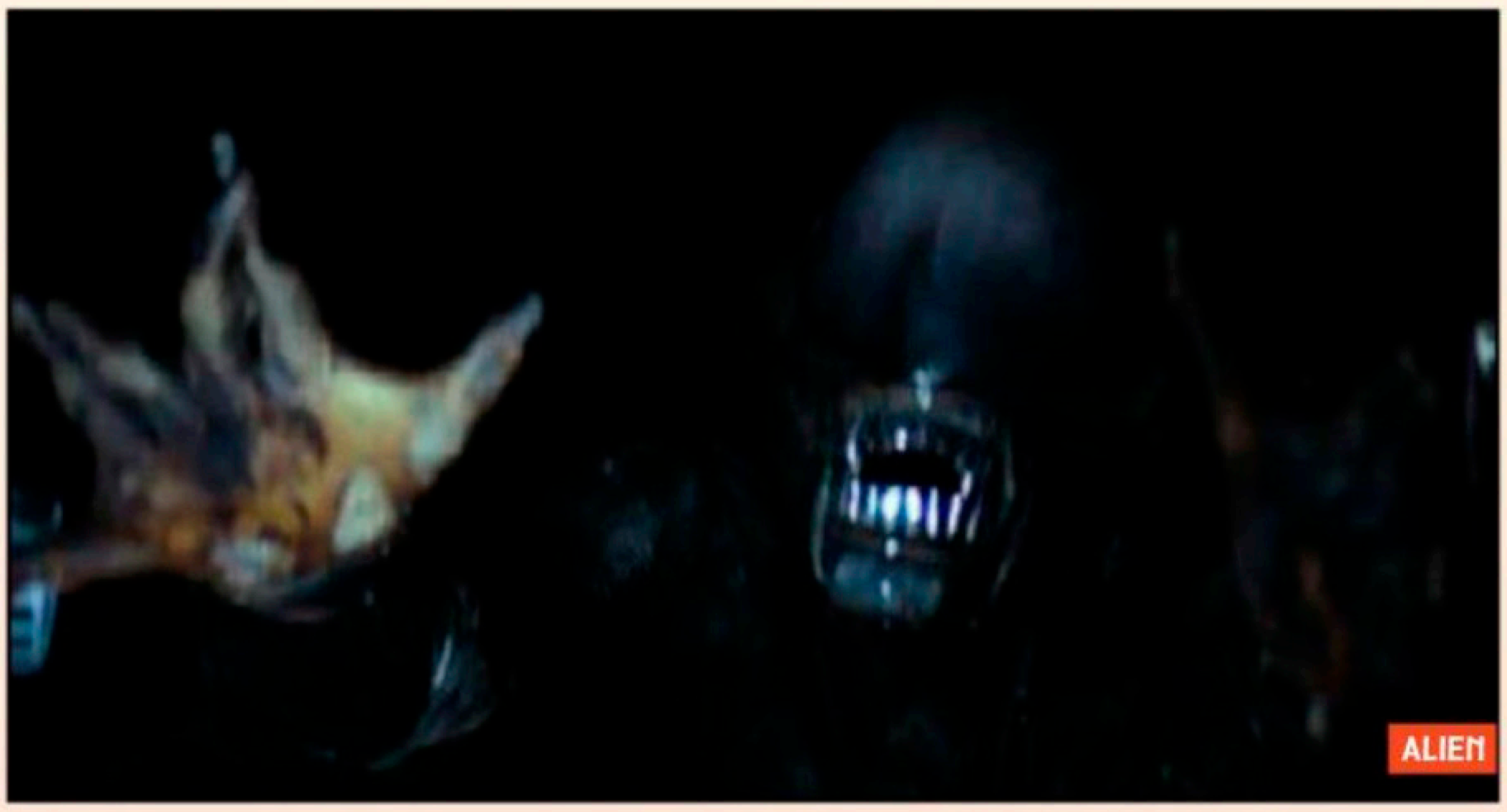
One of the earliest – and most effective – scares in horror film history has to be in Lon Chaney's *The Phantom of the Opera* (Rupert Julian, 1925) when Chaney's face mask is whipped off by Mary Philbin in the Phantom's underground lair beneath the Paris opera house. Rumour has it that audiences of the time near-enough evacuated their cinema seats (and/or their bowels) in fright. Chaney is happily playing his pipe organ (as all great screen villains do) after kidnapping Philbin, the object of his affection. Philbin pretends to be interested in Lon's musicianship, but really all she wants is to know what's behind the phantom's mask. So, she sneaks up behind him and – hey-up! What makes the scene so powerful is the double scare that ensures. We, the audience, clock Chaney's hideous visage before Mary does. What makes it worse is that we are then waiting for *her* reaction... I saw the movie in a cinema full of school kids. When the mask came off, I heard one cry out, "THAT'S HORRIBLE!" - not so much in fear but in surprise that a creaky old silent movie could be this scary. | JON TOWLSON

'THE ALIEN DOES DALLAS'

ALIEN (1979)

Not long after the release of *Aliens*, my local Classic Cinema in Birkenhead showed it at a double bill alongside *Alien*. My friend Julie and I went along, having seen both films several times. We arrived early and headed for central seats a few rows from the front. The cinema busied up around us. Of course, *Alien* grabbed immediately as it always has and always will. Julie and I had seen the film loads of times which is why I was somewhat surprised at what happened during the terrifyingly tense scenes where Dallas meets his end in the airshaft.

Julie had stocked up on sweets and, naughtily (I did tut), had her legs over the back of the seat in front. As Dallas swung the flamethrower around to reveal the xenomorph and its loud screech belted out, Julie screamed and jumped so much that her box of Maltesers pivoted off her lap, scattering on and around her, raising laughter from the entire audience behind us. But when *Alien* finished and we got up to go to the loo, people stared in horror because Julie's Maltesers had melted down the side of her leg in a chocolatey honeycomb mess that looked like she'd shit herself with fright. And so good was that jump scare that everyone who looked kind of understood why that might actually have happened. Now that's a great scare! | ROB MARTIN


ALIEN

'THE HOUSE BLEEDS'

HAMMER HOUSE OF HORROR (1980)

As a child, my parents gave me lots of freedom. I like to think of them as liberal rather than negligent. It became a regular thing for me to wave *them* off to bed, and given control of the TV, I'd usually find myself watching a horror film, usually a decade-old Hammer or Amicus affair. I'd imagine, though, that unless they went to bed *really* early, they'd have been in the room with me when I watched *The House That Bled to Death*, the fifth episode of the *Hammer House of Horror* series, broadcast on Saturday nights on ITV. Horror films meant Dracula and Frankenstein, fantasy creatures that I could pretend were not a part of an eight-year-old's world (although *The Ghoul* had scared the hell out of me a couple of months earlier), but this, *this* was too real. It was set in a house like mine, and the children in it were just like me, and the scene when blood pours out of the ceiling, covering everyone in gore, shocked me to my core. At the time, I didn't get the clever twist, and the show's final moments were even more horrifying, a murderous *child*, putting the house's favourite machete to good use. *Salem's Lot* and *An American Werewolf in London* would blow my tiny mind a year later, but *Hammer House of Horror* brought real world terror to a young boy's life for the first time. | ALAN BOON

'THE TOOTH FAIRY IS HERE'

DARKNESS FALLS (2003)

Everybody knows the age-old tale of the tooth fairy – as a child, you put your newly shed tooth under your pillow and the tooth fairy would come and collect it, leaving some money behind in exchange. In 2003, director Jonathan

HAMMER HOUSE OF HORROR

Liebesman took this once wholesome legend to a whole new twisted level in his film *Darkness Falls*. What scared me about this much-ignored movie actually takes place within the first fifteen minutes: Kyle Walsh puts his final baby tooth under the pillow and senses the presence of Matilda Dixon (the Tooth Fairy) for the first time. It's particularly unnerving in that it all takes place in the dark, and as a child having been afraid of the dark myself, it made me feel very uneasy knowing that what you're brought up to 'not be afraid of' is, in reality, out to kill you. To make matters even worse, if you somehow manage to look at Matilda you are then cursed by her vengeance, meaning that she will be after you for the rest of your life and will never stop. You would perpetually have to stay in the light – a darkened room, power cut, fused light… and the Tooth Fairy has you! | STEPHEN PIERCE

'THE NEEDLE PIT'

SAW II (2005)

It's funny what gets your own personal goat and what has the power to scare the proverbial crap out of you. Coming from a town in which an AIDS-ridden madman once ran amok plunging vials of his own blood into poor unsuspecting victims, *Saw II*'s 'Needle Pit' scene put a fresh set of willies up me that I had never felt before. The sequence, in which one of the eight victims of Jigsaw's latest plan (played by Shawnee Smith, check her out in the sitcom *Becker*, folks!) is thrown by another contestant into a pit full of dirty needles in order to scrabble around for a key is excruciating. It's difficult to pinpoint what it is exactly – it's certainly horrific, but is it horror? In the pantheon of Jigsaw's games, it's hardly the most gruesome but it is the grimmest. While others look into a pit of snakes wondering what worse there could be, I look into the pit of dirty fetid needles and *know* there are things hidden in those vials that are much, much worse. | LUKE FOX

'THE PENTHOUSE'

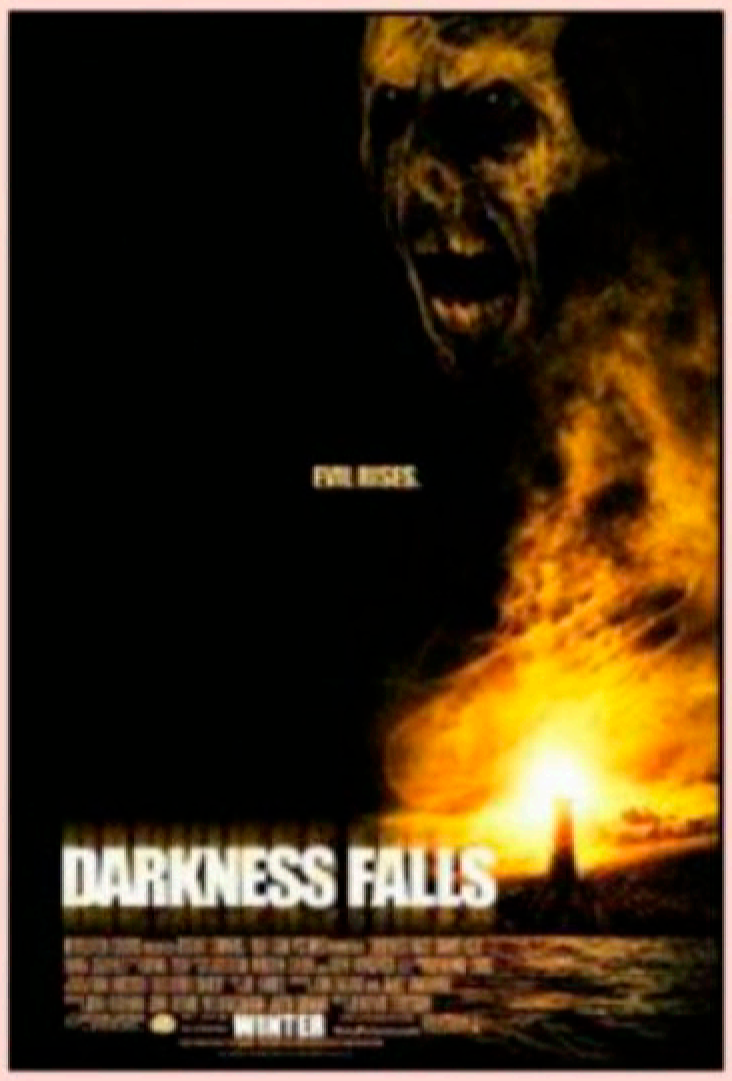
REC (2007)

Shot exclusively through the character's hand-held camera, *REC* sees reporter Angela and cameraman Pablo attempt to cover a sudden firefight at an apartment block in Barcelona. Trying to get the next big news story, they reveal that the deranged inhabitants seem to be infected, and unfortunately, they end up getting quarantined with them. As the undead fly towards the camera, *REC* comes across like a real-life walk through a haunted house, and with the kill count rising by the minute, Angela and Pablo eventually resort to hopefully finding solace in the penthouse. At this point, and after what they've been through, you're really rooting for them to escape. Little do they know that not only does the secret to this nasty outbreak lie in the penthouse, but so does their worst nightmare. Following a savage night of unimaginable, gory terror we reach the disjointed and just damn right unsettling ending. Experiment-gone-wrong Tristana is tall, withered, and just scary as hell. She stomps round the room in an almost clumsy fashion, and you're praying that she doesn't discover our survivors. With the camera in night vision mode you get to spectate a masterclass in horror, and when the film's hero finally succumbs to the clutches of Tristana and is dragged out of shot into the darkness, you realise that in *REC*, no one is safe. | ANDREW DEX

'CAPTAIN SCARLET CARKS IT'

CAPTAIN SCARLET AND THE MYSTERONS (1967)

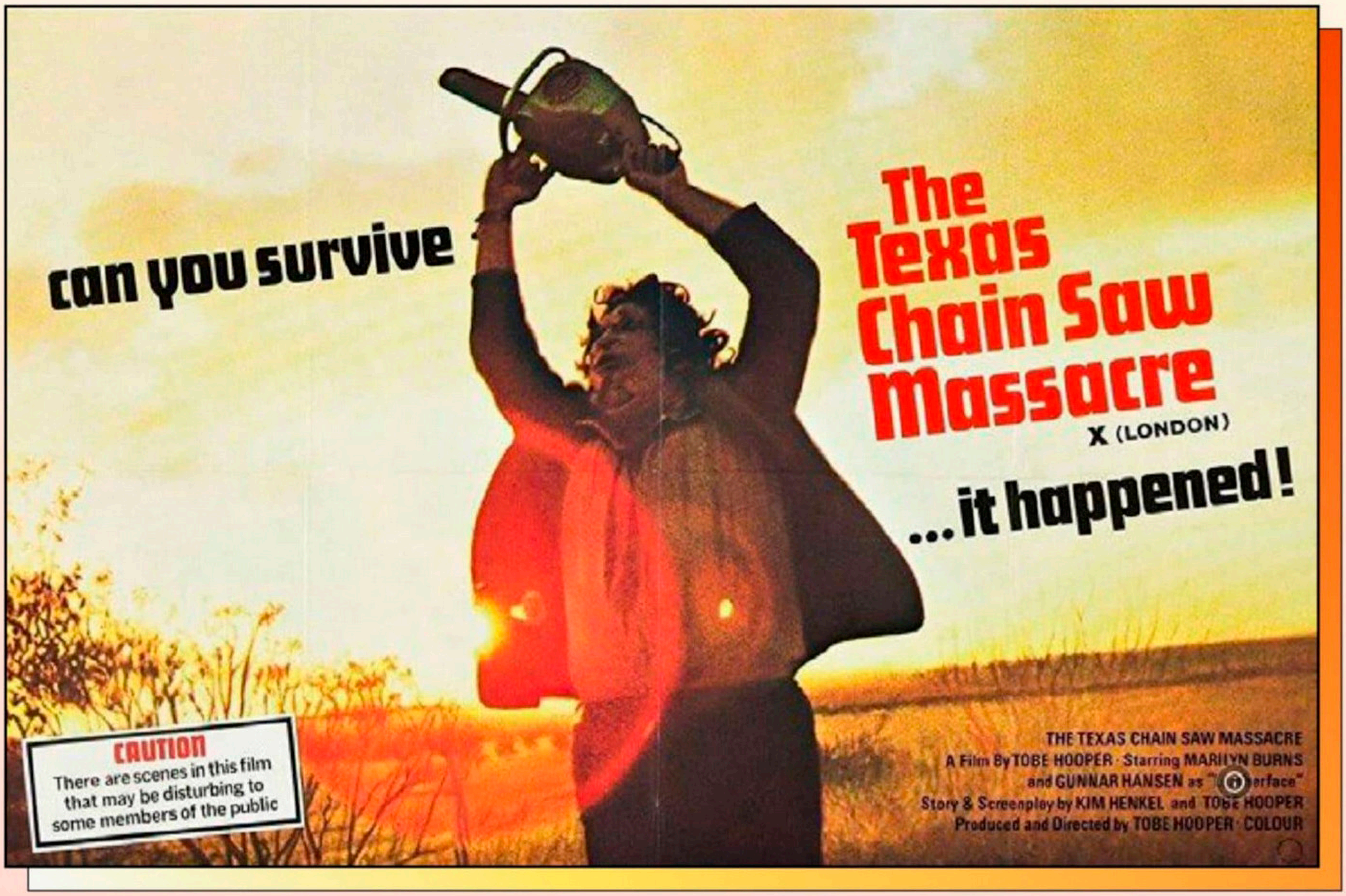
After the warmer vibes of *Stingray* and *Thunderbirds*, watching *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons* for the first time left me terrified yet engrossed.



SAW II

REC

CAPTAIN SCARLET


can you survive
The Texas Chain Saw Massacre
X (LONDON)
...it happened!
CAUTION
There are scenes in this film that may be disturbing to some members of the public
THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE
A Film By TOBE HOOPER · Starring MARILYN BURNS
and GUNNAR HANSEN as "[illegible]erface"
Story & Screenplay by KIM HENKEL and TOBE HOOPER
Produced and Directed by TOBE HOOPER · COLOUR

The creepy music, the grim premise, and the hyper-realistic approach to Supermarionation made the series an undeniably unnerving experience, its very first episode in particular. What made that debut episode terrifying came in its final, climactic moments: the Mysteron-ised Captain Scarlet has captured the World President and is holding him hostage atop of the London Car-Vu, while he and Captain Blue engage in a Western-style gun duel. The moment comes when Blue fires the decisive shot into Scarlet's heart. It's a moment of rapid-fire micro-actions. Blue's propulsive shot, Scarlet's grimaced face as the bullet hits, Barry Gray's percussive score that stabs with a deadly precision, and the sight of Scarlet falling off the Car-Vu to his 'death'. The fact that we actually see Scarlet plummet to the ground below, a primal scream accompanying his descent, is the icing on this wonderfully horrific cake. The petrifying impact of witnessing this gruesome and hair-raising death can't help but be muffled by the fact that it's produced using marionettes, but Captain Scarlet made its dark heart be felt with this iconic scene. | FRED MCNAMARA

'ENTER: LEATHERFACE'

THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE (1974)

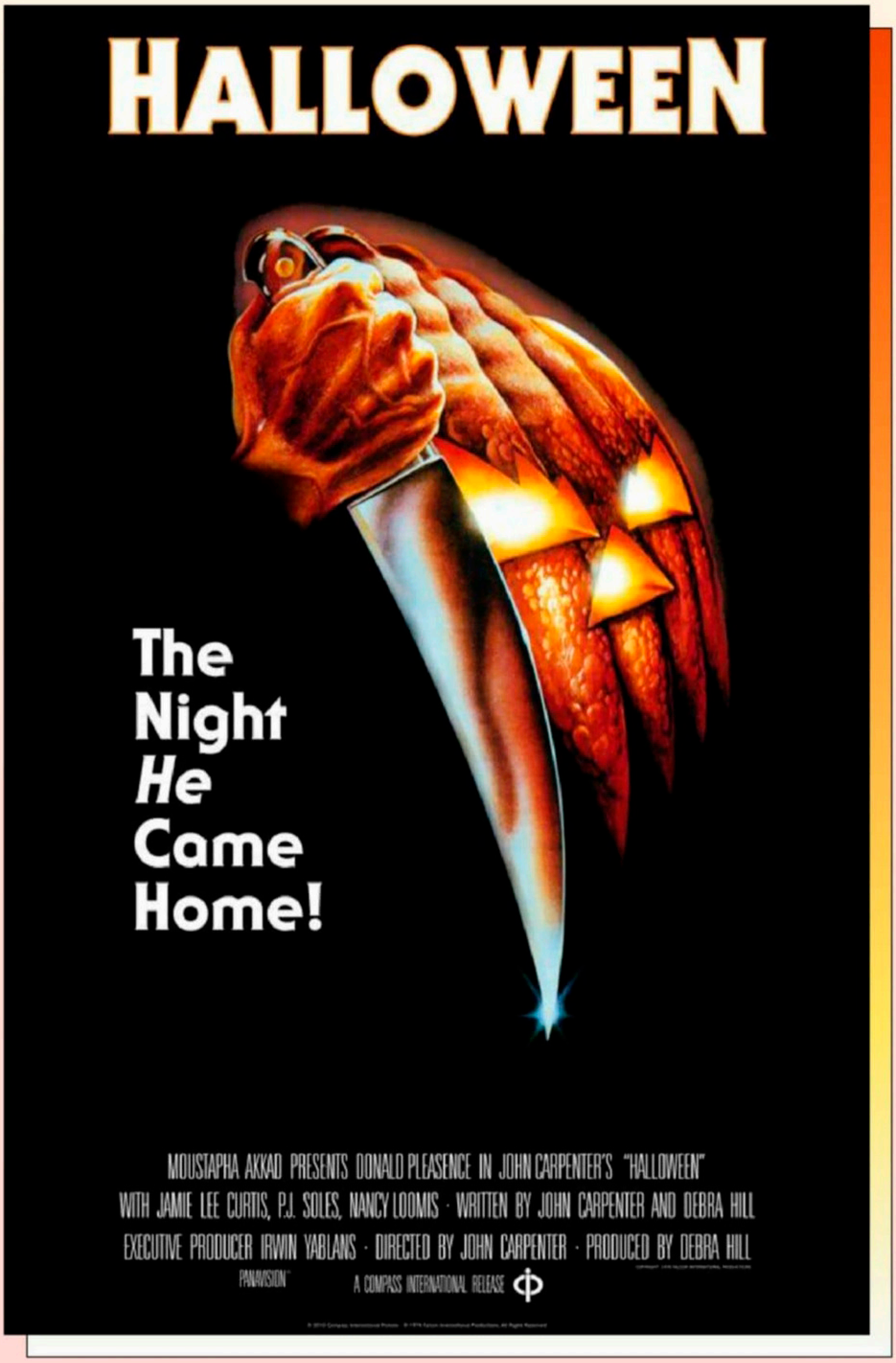
Tobe Hooper's influential and controversial horror has terrorised audiences for generations and set the table (so to speak) for the then-forthcoming slasher genre boom. Many scenes carry a disturbing and sadistic power to this day, but for sheer nerve-fraying impact, shock, and hands-over-the-eyes terror, has to be Leatherface's first onscreen appearance. As Kirk and Pam search for gas, they stumble upon an isolated house. Kirk goes in to see who's home (meet the Sawyers!) and is alerted by grunting noises from a specific doorway. As he walks towards this ominous red doorway adorned with different animal skulls (Carol Smillie would've had a field day with this room), he trips over a ramp at the entrance and, with no music to signpost or elevate the shock, the human-skin-mask-wearing antagonist Leatherface strikes with a hammer blow, flooring Kirk and leaving him bloodied and convulsing. He then drags Kirk into his room and slams that metal sliding door. It's a moment of such shocking, violent, and brutal power, that it leaves you almost breathless. The scene uses the full extent of the fear of the unexpected and immediately birthed a horror icon whose legacy endures to this day. | JACK BOTTOMLEY

'MIKE?'

THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT (1999)

After getting increasingly scared and lost, Heather and Mike are left alone in the woods, as fellow filmmaker Josh goes missing. Desperate and disorientated, they find an abandoned house, convinced they can hear Josh screaming out to them. As they clumsily stumble around in the dark, we see children's handprints covering the wall - foreshadowed in an interview with a local, in which he describes the hermit Rustin Parr (a child murderer who made his victims stand in the corner before executing them). This immediately puts the audience on edge, imploring the duo to escape the house. Mike, his sanity drastically low, runs into the basement followed by Heather. His camera crashes to the floor and as Heather runs into the room, Mike is facing the wall, just like all the child victims before him. With no special effects or jump scares, the hair rose from my arms and a sense of sheer

THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT


HALLOWEEN
The Night He Came Home!
MOUSTAPHA AKKAD PRESENTS DONALD PLEASENCE IN JOHN CARPENTER'S "HALLOWEEN"
WITH JAMIE LEE CURTIS, P.J. SOLES, NANCY LOOMIS · WRITTEN BY JOHN CARPENTER AND DEBRA HILL
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER IRWIN YABLANS · DIRECTED BY JOHN CARPENTER · PRODUCED BY DEBRA HILL
PANAVISION
A COMPASS INTERNATIONAL RELEASE

dread took hold. As Heather's camera hits the ground and the film ends, I knew I was in for a sleepless night. The combination of good storytelling and the unknown had a dramatic effect on my 15-year-old self and audiences worldwide, leaving me with goose bumps in an American multiplex in 1999 and even now, as I relive the film's conclusion. *The Blair Witch Project* encapsulated horror's golden rule - less is more. | JACOB WALKER

'THE WALK'

HALLOWEEN (1978)

John Carpenter's Halloween hit me like an electric shock from the nerve-jangling opening theme. I hadn't seen anything like this level of sustained menace since *Psycho*. Despite the film being a blueprint for the slasher films that followed to the point it became a cliché, *Halloween* is a master work. It also contains the single most subtly unsettling scene I've seen in a horror movie. It's not the early subjective point of view death of Judith Myers' by her younger brother, or the slaughter of the teenagers. It's not even Michael Myers' disappearance at the end, robbing us of the comforting reassurance that the menace was defeated. It's the scene where Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis) has discovered the bodies of her friends and has barely survived the first attack at the house across the road. She runs out screaming for help. Behind her, we see Michael, knife in hand, strolling calmly. No rush. Nothing brisk in his inexorable pace. He knows he's going to get her and he never breaks his relentless pace. To this day, her traumatic terror and his chilling confidence makes this the scariest scene in horror for me. | ROBIN PIERCE

'JOSH'S ACHILLES HEEL'

HOSTEL (2005)

With an intriguing premise that was scarily based on real-life organisations, Eli Roth's *Hostel* set up Josh (Derek Richardson) and Paxton (Jay Hernandez) as the film's main protagonists who would make it through until the grim 'n' gory movie's final act – only things didn't quite play out like that for poor Josh. With that character, Roth used him as the first real example of what twisted actions were at play from the Elite Hunting Group. Specialising in kidnapping and auctioning off tourists, Elite's M.O. meant a horrendous ordeal was awaiting Josh at the hands of an unnamed Dutch businessman (Jan Vlasak). A drill to the knees started the torture, a sliced throat ended it, but in-between was a truly wince-inducing moment. After a few off-screen slices to Josh's body were followed by the surprising decision for him to be granted his freedom, Josh stood up to leave. It was there, of course, that we were treated to the stomach-churning image of his heel peeling off from the bottom of his foot, with the reveal that his Achilles tendons had been cut open. And to think, some of us bunked a day off work to see *Hostel* on its first day of release... | ANDREW POLLARD

'RALPHIE GLICK TAPS ON THE GLASS'

SALEM'S LOT (1979)

It was around 10.30pm on August 15th, 1985. I was six years old. Mum and Dad were out for the evening and my grandfather was babysitting. Grandad tucked me into bed and turned on my portable telly. David Soul faded in on the screen and grandad said; "*there you go, Starksy & Hutch*". But it wasn't. It was *Salem's Lot*. I had never seen a horror film before and didn't know what one was. Grandad turned the light off, closed the door then left me alone at the mercy of the miniseries. Within minutes, the scene began where child vampire Ralphie Glick floated up through the mist outside his brother Danny's bedroom window, with that nerve-shredding smile, and started lightly tapping the glass. I froze. Harry Sukman's string score intensified and Danny opened the window. Ralphie floated across the room to his brother who was steadily backing away and I released a healthy stream of warm, golden urine into my Superman pyjamas then lunged face first under the covers into the flowing wee in

HOSTEL

SALEM'S LOT

fear, until the horror was finally over. I'm pretty sure I eventually recovered from that moment, but I never watched *Starsky & Hutch* again. | DANIEL GOODWIN

'SWEET DREAMS'

AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON (1981)

David's dreaming. Back at home, life is as it used to be. The doorbell rings, his grumpy father gets up to answer it. Nobody expects demons dressed as Nazis, armed with machine guns. They open fire, massacre the family, and set the house ablaze. At age twelve, I'd never seen anything like this – this stark invasion of normality was more startling than the other dream interludes, despite their effective shock value – and David getting his throat sliced open is a closing image that I've carried with me for decades. He wakes up and, even knowing what's to come, my relief remains huge. There's the nurse, just as she was before falling asleep, and she knows the remedy for bad dreams is to let the daylight in. She opens the curtains, only to find that the monster still exists. I still jump when that demon roars, still wince when the knife is plunged into Jenny Agutter again and again, a brutal act of violence. It's arguably the most sickening scene in the film, yet also the most effective, and has never lost any of its resonance. What if, when waking up from the nightmare, we're still trapped in it? | ALISTER DAVISON

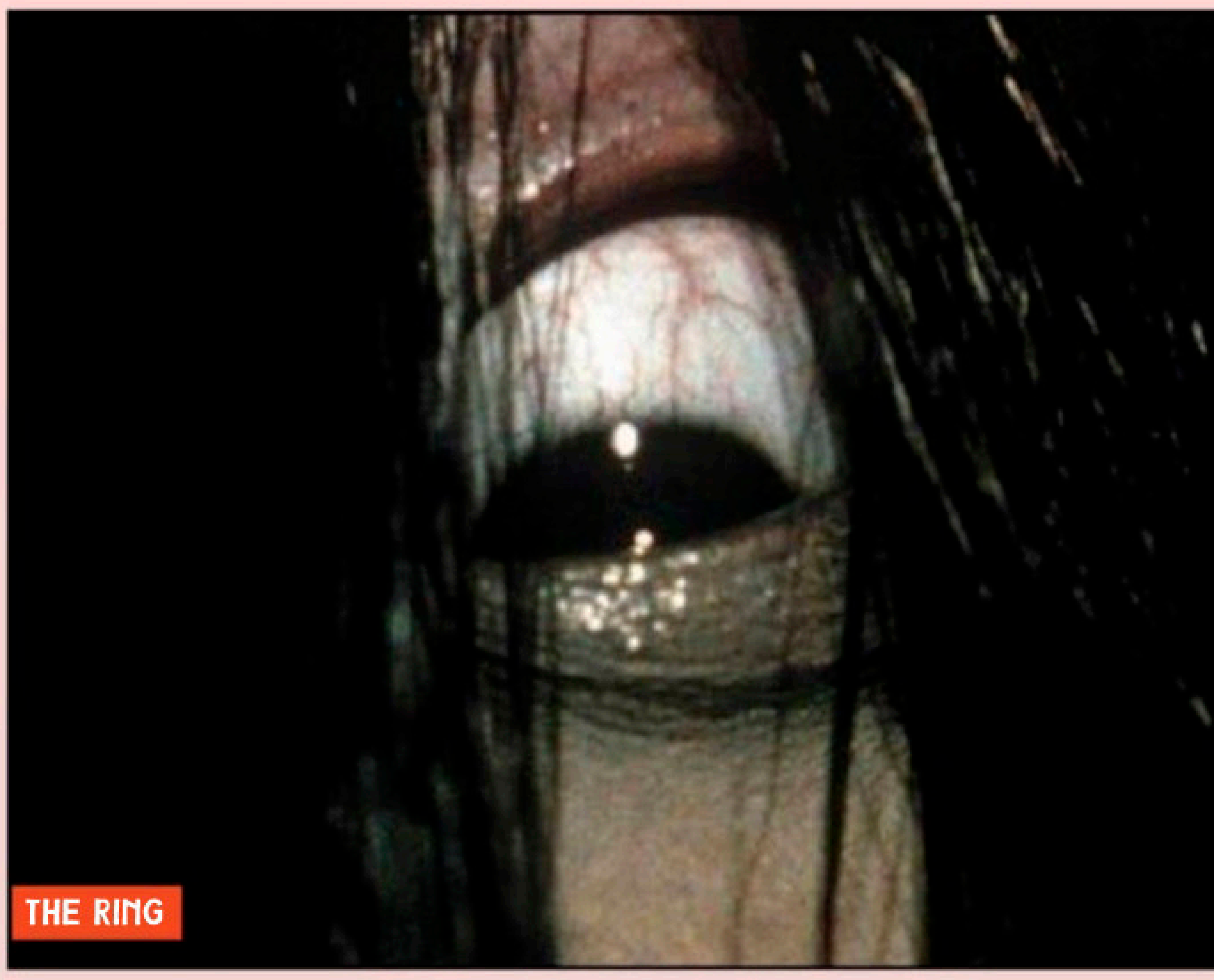
'SADAKO SEES YOU'

THE RING (1998)

The Ring revolves around a video cassette cursed to kill people seven days after viewing it, the mystery slowly revealed as a journalist investigates its story. Its now-infamous climax shows how the afflicted meet their end. On a TV, Sadako, the murder victim whose psychic death throes of spite and vengeance created the tape, emerges from the well that was her tomb and begins shambling towards the screen. Discordant music creates unease, augmented by crackling static and tracking glitches that prevent you from fully focusing. The barrier of mediums proves to be no hindrance, and Sadako emerges from the TV to continue her inexorable advance. She crawls across the carpet, fingernails torn off from futilely clawing at the stone walls of her prison, while spasmodic and unnatural movements suggest she's forgotten how to act human. Lank hair hides her face as she stands, her rising head threatening unspeakable horror beneath. However, it's the final moment that seals it, a sudden cut to an extreme close-up of a single glaring eye - wide, accusatory, unforgiving, and accompanied by a piercing noise sharp enough to shred your soul – that truly convinces you it's possible for someone to be literally scared to death. | ANDREW MARSHALL

So now it's over to you, dear reader! We want to hear about the screen moments that have scared you silly and scarred you for life! Share your scares with us over on our socials @STARBURST_Mag, and help us make this Halloween season a special one!

AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON


THE RING

THE CANDYMAN CAN

by Joel Harley

With the much-loved horror icon set to return to screens soon, we take a closer look at the character and legacy of CANDYMAN...

"They saw off his right hand with a rusty blade. And no one came to his aid, for this was just the beginning of his ordeal. Nearby there was an apiary. Dozens of hives, filled with hungry bees. They smashed the hive and stole the honeycomb and smeared it over his prone, naked body. Candyman was stung to death by the bees. They burned his body on a giant pyre and scattered his ashes over Cabrini Green."

- Dr Phillip Purcell, *Candyman* (1992)

So goes the tragic legend of Candyman, a famous, talented painter and the son of a slave, but a free man, dismembered, stung to death by bees and burned to a crisp. This treatment, at the hand of a lynch mob, for the perceived crime of falling in love with a rich white woman in 19th-century America. Reborn as a murderous urban legend, Candyman lives on in whispers and rumours, his name spoken in hushed tones - and don't you dare say it five times. Not if there are any mirrors in the vicinity, anyway.

At least that's how the legend goes in Bernard Rose's 1992 horror classic. The original short story upon which Rose's film is based - Clive Barker's *The Forbidden*, included in Volume V of his *Books of Blood* - is skimpy on the details, even if the hook-handed killer, swarms of bees and rough plot outline remain the same.

Bernard Rose's adaptation transplanted the story from Liverpool to Chicago, and onto the notorious estate of Cabrini Green. While most slasher films of the '80s and '90s were set on bright suburban streets and idyllic summer camps, Cabrini Green is a fascinating hive of crime, violence, breathtaking graffiti, and the most disgusting toilet this side of *Trainspotting*. As in Barker's short story, *Candyman* follows graduate student Helen Lyle (Virginia Madsen, although one Sandra Bullock was also in contention for the role) investigating urban legends in the inner city. Here, she hears the story of a hook-handed ghost who can be summoned by repeating his name five times while looking in a mirror. Naturally sceptical, Helen and best friend Bernadette (Kasi Lemmons) complete the ritual and are duly underwhelmed when nothing appears to happen. At first.

After being beaten up by a local gangster appropriating his name, Helen meets the real deal - the magnetic, hook-handed, fur-coat wearing Candyman himself (the inimitable Tony Todd) - in a parking garage. Here, she blacks out, waking up in the middle of a crime scene, next to a decapitated dog and accused of kidnapping a child. Candyman's curious modus operandi of framing naïve white women is curiously low-rent for a slasher icon but is a through-line for both this film and its sequels. In the climax, Helen battles Candyman beneath a bonfire for kidnapped baby Anthony's life, subsequently burning to death and transformed into a vengeful spirit herself. Bad news for sleazy, cheating husband Trevor (Xander Berkeley) who discovers Helen's transformation the hard way during the film's stinger - stabbed to death after saying *her* name five times in the mirror.

With *Candyman,* a horror icon for the ages was born. The film was praised for its brooding, oppressive atmosphere and Tony Todd's commanding performance. A sequel was inevitable. In 1995, Bill Condon's *Farewell to the Flesh* was released. It follows New Orleans schoolteacher Annie (Kelly Rowan), who attempts to debunk the legend of Candyman, by saying his name. This results in the killer running amok in New Orleans, stalking Annie, her husband and friends. Although Condon's follow-up to *Candyman* is by

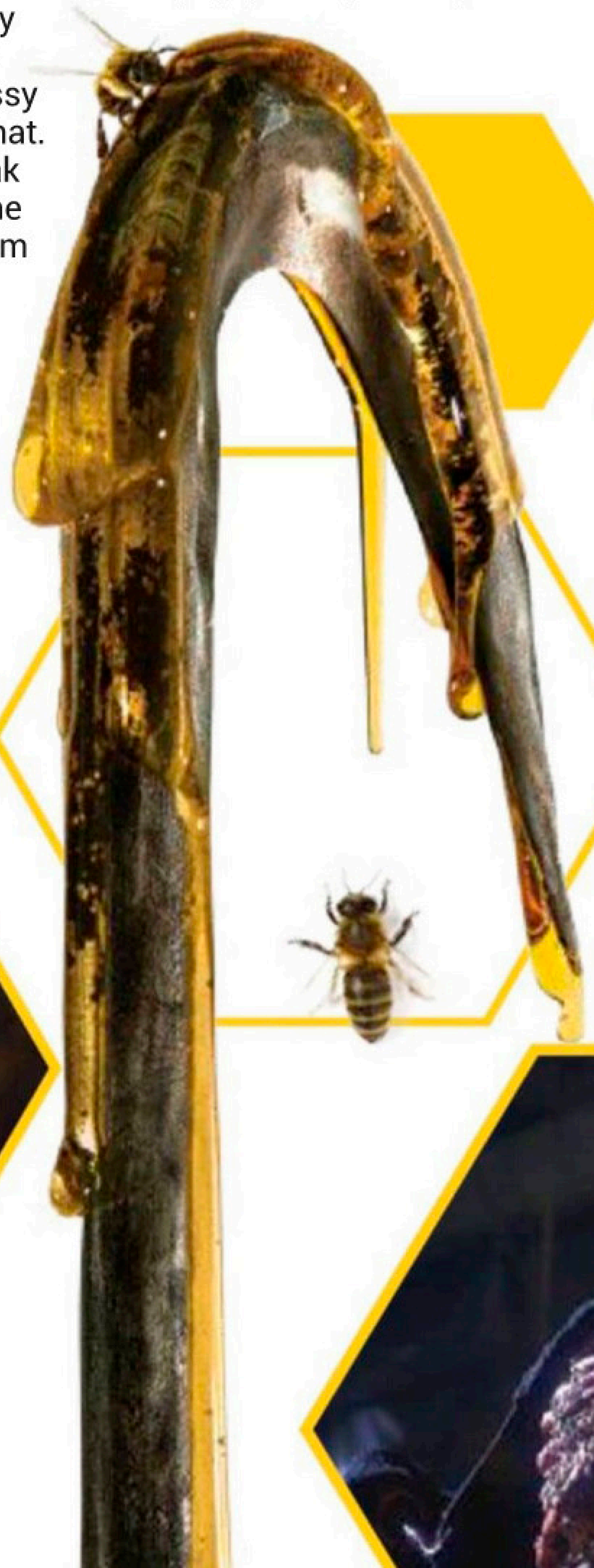
no means the worst of the '90s slasher sequels that were all the rage at the time (it's not even the worst *Candyman* film), it lacks the originality and wit of its predecessor. It did, however, delve deeper into Candyman's past and give him his real name - Daniel Robitaille.

This sequel was less liked than its predecessor but still reasonably successful at the box office. And so, for franchisedom's sake, a third entry in the series was made. In 1999, Turi Meyer's *Day of the Dead* was released. It stars Donna D'Errico as art gallery owner Caroline, a direct descendant of Candyman himself. Stalked by the hook-handed killer as he kills off her friends and family, Caroline is framed for murder (you know how it goes) and even meets a Candyman cult, via the biggest ball gag this side of *Pulp Fiction*. The straight-to-video *Day of the Dead* is a workmanlike entry in the series, re-treading too much old ground without bringing all that much to the table. In place of the previous films' mood and atmosphere, it ups the nudity quotient, hoping that audiences will be blinded to the film's sins by the fact that... ooh, Donna D'Errico isn't wearing a bra! There are far worse horror sequels out there, but a resounding lack of enthusiasm for the film stalled the franchise, despite audiences' love for the character and Bernard Rose's original movie.

It could have been so very different, though. Originally written as a gaudy, brightly dressed Caucasian man who smelled like candyfloss (with a waxy yellow flesh and pale blue lips to boot), Barker's description of Candyman couldn't be any more different from Rose's depiction - only the hook and bees made the transition to film. Even the whole 'say his name five times' deal was absent from *The Forbidden*. Who's to say whether or not Tony Todd smells like candyfloss, but we would guess not. It was Todd himself who came up with Candyman's backstory, creating the tragic tale of one, uh, Granville T. Candyman, a famous black painter in 1870s Chicago. Falling in love with the daughter of a wealthy white landowner, he was chased down by a jeering lynch mob, who cut off his hand, smothered him in honey and set a swarm of bees upon him, stinging him to death.

Thankfully, the film did away with the ludicrous 'Granville T. Candyman' moniker, but the rest of Todd's original vision made it through intact. Seeing Candyman as his take on the Phantom of the Opera or Count Dracula, there's a nobility to the character that's absent in most of his peers - say, the vile Freddy Krueger, or imbecilic Jason and Leatherface. There's a respectability to Candyman that most horror icons lack, and a dignity in his looming presence. Many slasher villains are driven by vengeance, but in the Candyman's case, it's a righteous one. You'll never find Candyman chasing sexed-up teenagers around the woods, or getting into a fistfight with Busta Rhymes. You'd certainly never see him in space. Maybe if they had stuck with their original choice of Eddie Murphy (too expensive), but Tony Todd is too classy for all that. To speak his name gives him strength, and with the legend, Candyman can live on forever. A timeless reminder of the sins of the past, and America's ugliest crimes. As he put it himself: "*I am the writing on the wall, the whisper in the classroom! Without these things, I am nothing!*"

Thankfully, Candyman has nothing to worry about. Even today, he remains one of horror cinema's most memorable antagonists thanks to his iconic design, tragic story, and Tony Todd's masterful performance. If power comes from his legacy, drawn from whispers, dreams and nightmares, then Candyman is doing just fine - especially with Nia DaCosta and Jordan Peele's franchise reboot on the way to terrify a new generation of movie-goers.



SWEETS TO THE SWEET

In Anticipation of *Candyman* 2020

Feel old yet? It's been over twenty years since *Candyman: Day of the Dead*. Over two decades since the last Candyman movie, and even longer since Tony Todd's horror icon made his debut. In that time, there have been no reboots, sequels, playable *Mortal Kombat* DLC or even comic book tie-ins for the character. In spite of Tony Todd repeatedly expressing interest in returning to the franchise, his Candyman has remained dormant, the legend well-known but inactive. "*It's a blessed condition, believe me,*" the great man said once, "*To live in people's dreams; to be whispered at street corners, but not have to be.*" In that respect, he could afford the time off.

But by now, most of his genre peers have managed to crossover, reboot, and come back again. Some of them have even done it multiple times. Leatherface has had more fresh starts than he's had headcheese suppers. Michael Myers made a bunch of sequels, a remake, and another sequel, and then re-emerged in 2018 with Blumhouse's *Halloween*. But Candyman's legacy has in no way diminished in that time, and *Candyman* is considered by many to be a modern masterpiece; a classic, and the best Clive Barker adaptation (one's mileage may vary, depending on how you want to rate *Hellraiser*).

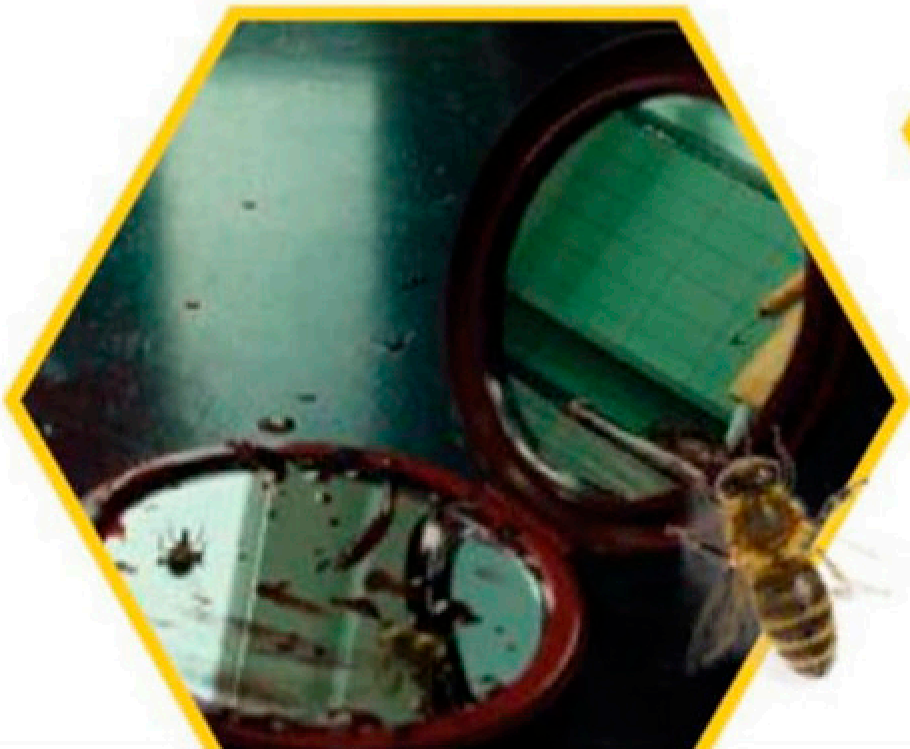
Thankfully, the character is set to get his dues in this year's hotly-anticipated *Candyman*, directed by Nia DaCosta and written by genre favourite Jordan Peele. Audiences will have to wait until the film's release for all the gory details, but DaCosta's reboot-slash-sequel is set to follow Yahya Abdul-Mateen II as Anthony McCoy, a young artist using Candyman as inspiration for his work. Wait... Anthony?!

Yes, it would seem that Abdul-Mateen is set to play the very same Anthony who was kidnapped as an infant in 1992's *Candyman*. Vanessa Estelle Williams also appears as Anthony's mother - back from the first film - and Cassie Kramer is credited as playing Helen Lyle. But the question on everyone's lips is of the titular man himself (just, you know, don't say it in front of a mirror). Just who will be donning the fur cloak and bloody hook?

In the best news possible, Tony Todd is reported to be reprising his role as Candyman. To what extent, however, remains unclear. *Evil Dead* 2013-style cameo? Or could we have a *Freddy's Revenge* situation on our hands, with Candyman using Anthony's body as the instrument of his revenge? We wouldn't put it past him. Abdul-Mateen certainly has precedent in being the unwitting host of super-powered beings - playing the secret Doctor Manhattan in last year's *Watchmen*.

However or whoever he turns out to be, we fancy that Candyman is in good hands with Nia DaCosta and Jordan Peele. His story has also never been timelier, well... you know what's going on out there right now. Writer Peele has shown his genre bona fides in *Get Out* and *Us*, and the huge buzz around director DaCosta suggests she's one to watch. Big budget horror films don't get much more high-profile than the *Candyman* reboot. It's about time the big man made his return, and the talent involved have the potential to turn this into something great. Consider us hooked.

Say his name five times and CANDYMAN will be sure to return to cinema screens soon...



IT'S *STILL* 1977 AND LOOK WHAT'S BACK!

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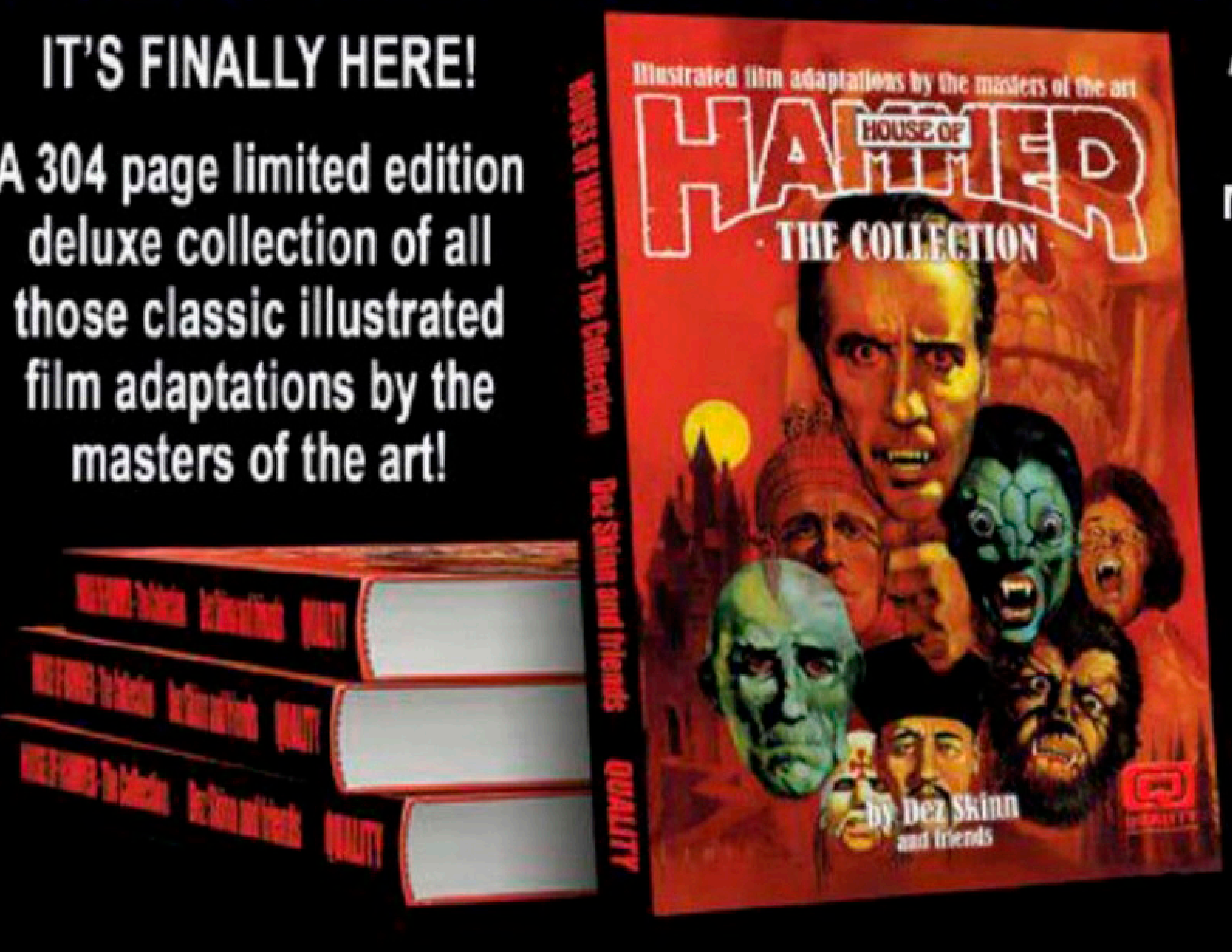
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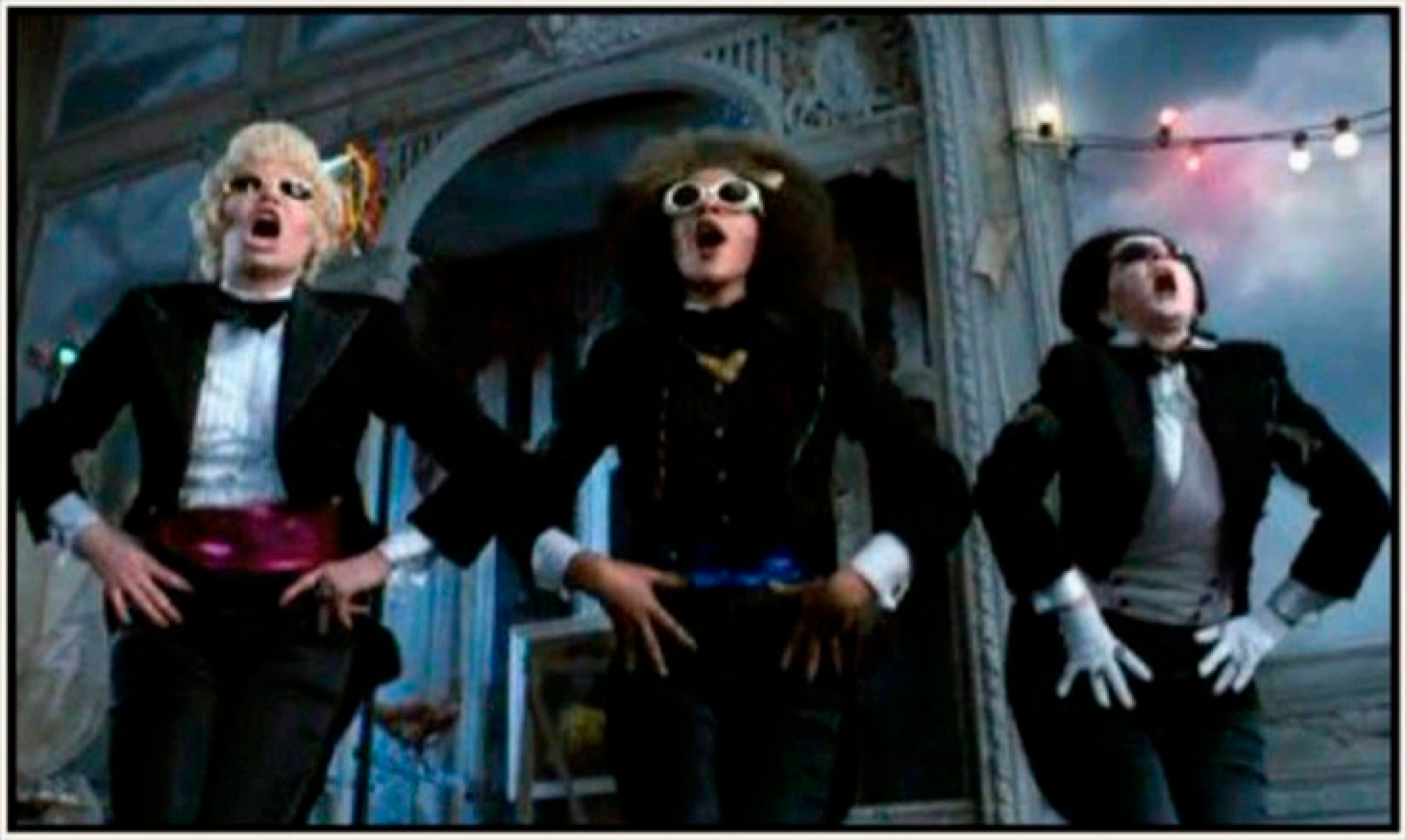
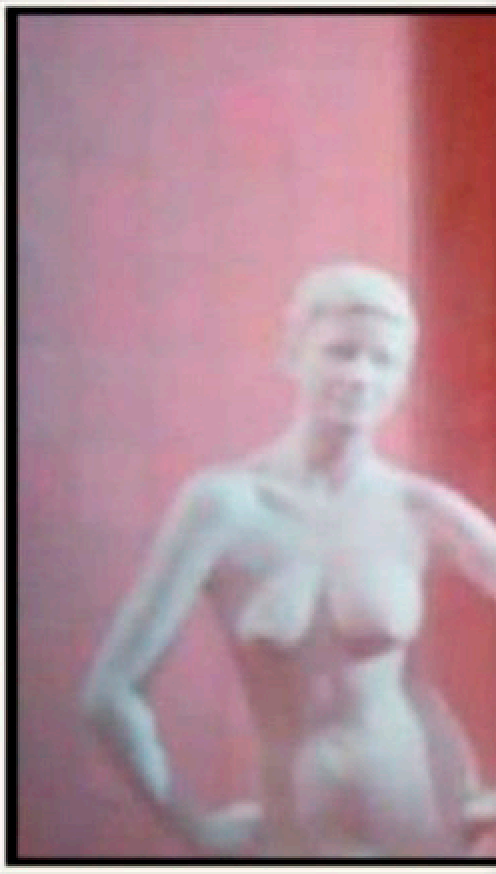
THROWING OFF THE CLOAK

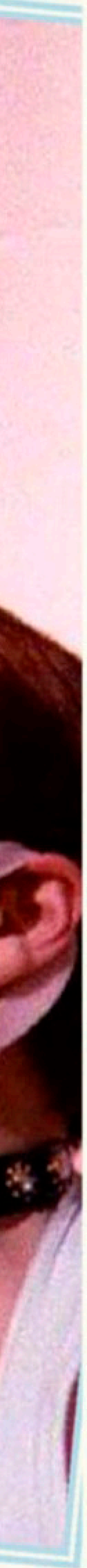
WHY THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW IS SEXY AS EVER AT 45

by Rachel Knightley

Cinema's most beautiful monster just turned 45! The love child of a fringe theatre show, THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW has been the definitive midnight movie for every generation since its release back in 1975. Parody and love letter in equal measure, it simultaneously mocks and embodies all it touches - science fiction and schlock horror, sentimentality and terror, fifties innocence and the birth of rock and roll to the glittery heights of glam rock. Greater than the sum of its parts and unapologetically itself, Rocky Horror still encapsulates costume party, theatrical extravaganza, cult film, and personal liberation, created by writer and actor RICHARD O'BRIEN on the background of an era that barely dared dream such transgression, let alone be it...







I WOULD LIKE, IF I MAY, TO TAKE YOU ON A STRANGE JOURNEY

O'Brien was unemployed the winter he wrote the music, book, and lyrics for **The Rocky Horror Show**. It premiered upstairs at the Royal Court Theatre in 1973, directed and produced by Jim Sharman, who would also direct the film, and who had worked with O'Brien before and shared his frustration with previous rock musicals. Musical director Richard Hartley and producer Michael White journeyed with them from theatre to film. Then, Lou Adler saw the production in London and transferred it to LA's Roxy and the Waverly Theatre, Manhattan. Created for the joy of it, *Rocky Horror* was an obvious love song to the B-movie - not only in the iconic opening song, but in visual references from start to finish - but look closer, and it's a love affair with something much more: the expression of individuality, and finding truth of self through performance.

"Perfection is not enough and creator and monster both want more."

I SEE YOU SHIVER WITH ANTICI...

At first, it's Brad and Janet's story: a newly-engaged Eisenhower-era couple (played by Barry Bostwick and Susan Sarandon) who get a flat tyre in a thunder storm and take refuge in the castle they spot from the road. It also happens to be the night Dr Frank N. Furter has summoned his motorbiking followers to a Transylvanian convention. Gathered to witness and celebrate the night he creates his perfect monster: Rocky (Peter Hinwood). Born a Steve Reeves-style bodybuilder, thanks to a transplant of half of the brain of biker Eddie (Meatloaf), sporting glittery gold pants and bearing no navel.

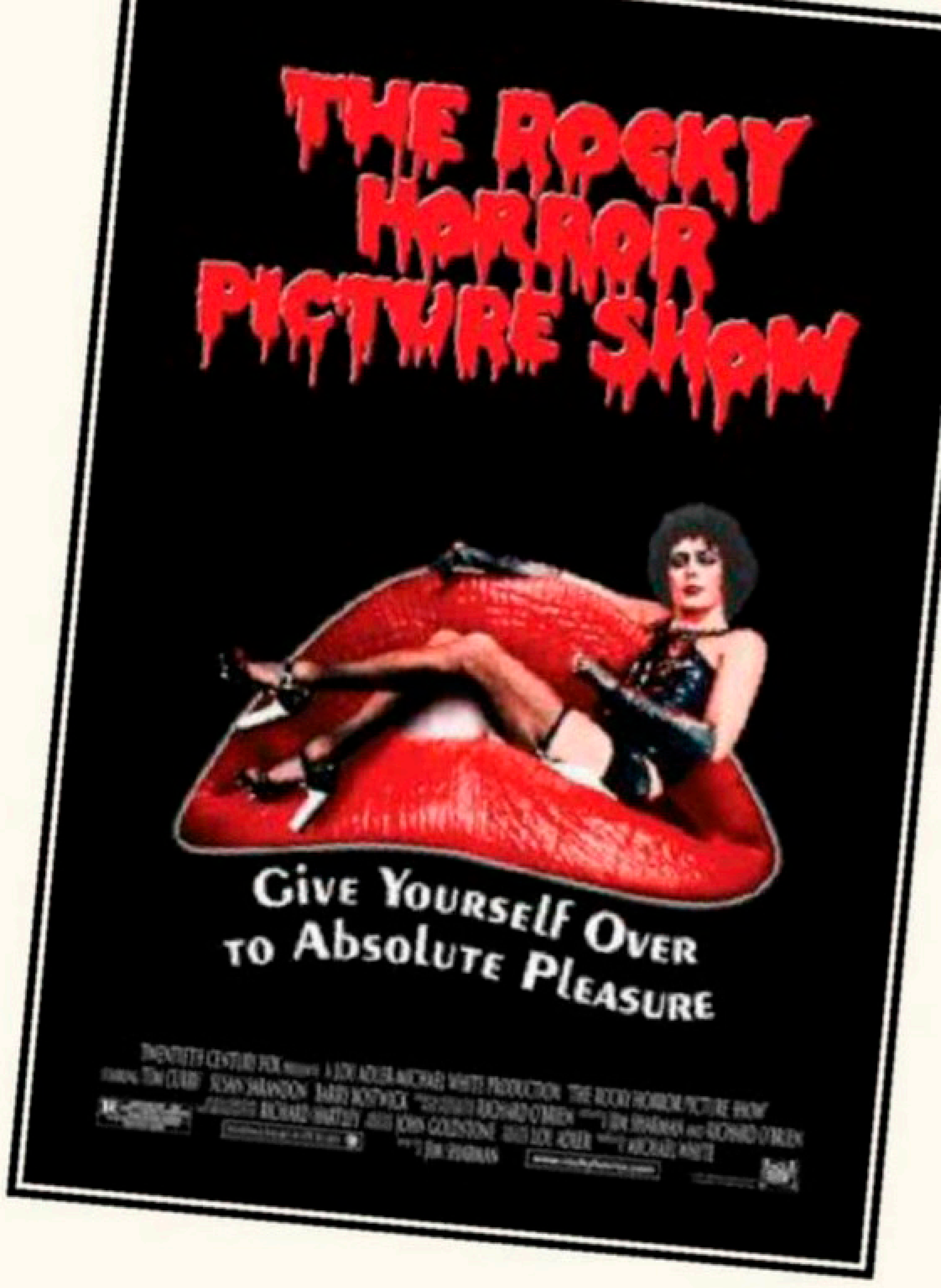
However, perfection is not enough and creator and monster both want more. But the darkness starts much earlier. Like the building of suspense at the beginning of *The Time Warp* or *Sweet Transvestite*, the suggestion right from the start is that conformity was the costume, and that those sensible understated figures standing at the back of the small-town church wedding (Tim Curry who will be Frank, and O'Brien as Riff Raff, Patricia Quinn as Magenta, and 'Little' Nell Campbell as Columbia) replicating Grant Wood's American Gothic painting mean that sensible, suited world was the disguise all the time while the lipstick and suspenders were the revelation, the deeper truth.

...PATION.

For O'Brien, Frank N. Furter was "*This very, very liberated human being from way out there... throwing off the cloak and singing 'I'm just a sweet transvestite' with his hands on his hips and looking smug about it... **claiming** his right to be so*". Given how our current era is still struggling to accept sexual equality let alone LGBTQ+ sexual expression, it's hard for those of us who weren't there to imagine what life would have been like without the visual language of glam rock that 'allowed me to be myself more', letting personal reality find its feet and voice through performance.

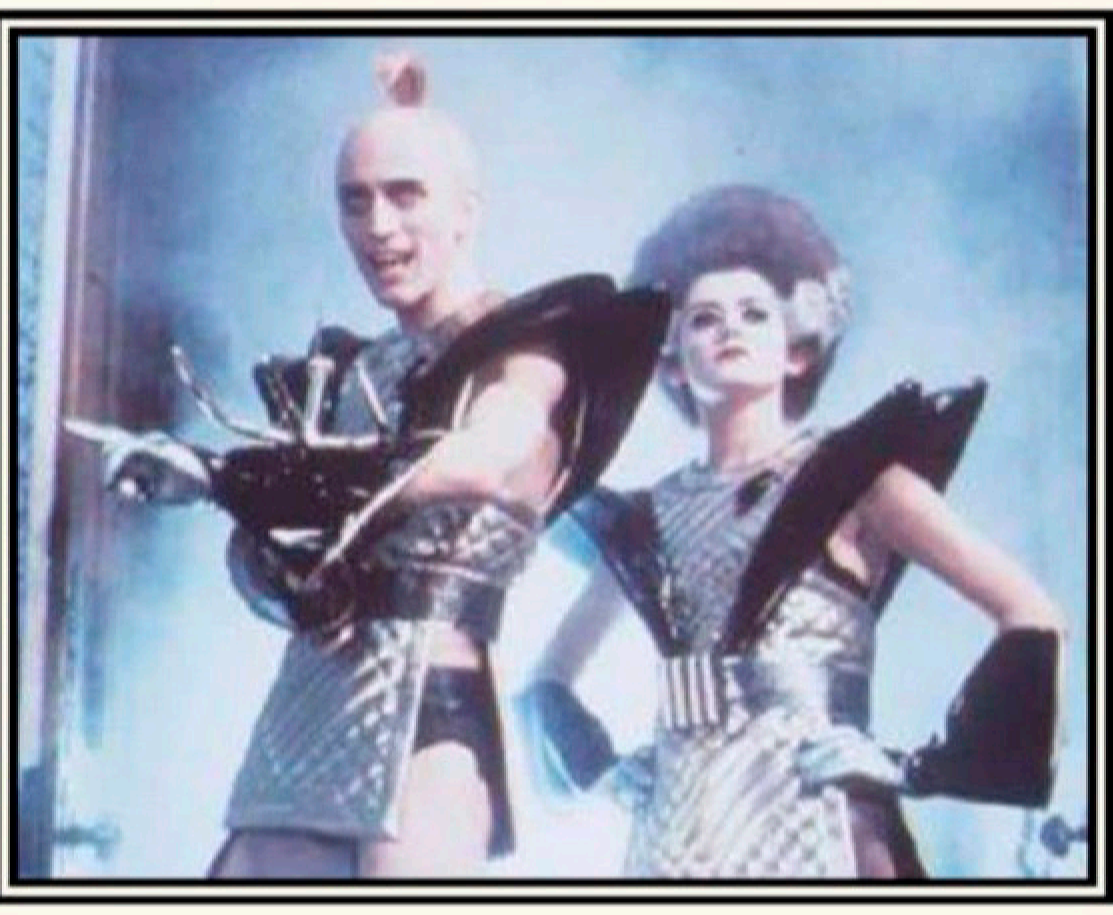
I'M A WILD AND AN UNTAMED THING

Innocence and experience is not as simple as good and evil, either. Brad's us-and-them snobbery ("*Yes Janet, life's pretty cheap for that type...*"; "*People like you maybe...*") is not only his but also Frank's downfall in the end: not Frank's acts of sexual transgression - those make him the hero - but underestimating his servants and hangers-on and seeing himself and his choices as above them. His extremes are his fatal flaw and it is for this he is punished, this from which, as Dr Scott says, "*Society must be protected*". "*Absolute Pleasure*" is not the crime. Cruelty and snobbery are what the characters must change and learn from, or die.


THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW
Give Yourself Over to Absolute Pleasure

GIVE YOURSELF OVER TO ABSOLUTE PLEASURE

Genre fans will often approach *Rocky Horror* by asking whether you've seen all the films listed in the opening song *Science Fiction Double Feature* - where Patricia Quinn's lips and creator Richard O'Brien's voice blend in one of the simplest and most hypnotic cinematic images of all time. *Rocky Horror* fans won't ask that. Sure, *Rocky Horror* is as much a salute as it is a parody to the horror, science fiction, and rock and roll that came before it, but it's also its own story, its own cinema, and its own music. The great thing about art is what you see before you, and what you are moved by, exists on its own terms for its own sake. You might share its influences, but you don't have to know a single one of them. Okay, it couldn't have existed without what came before it, but



ANATOMY OF A SONG

BY MARTIN UNSWORTH

The opening song of THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW was originally sung by The Usherette in the stage version. She was replaced by an iconic pair of lips for the film, but the references stayed the same. Let's find out where they came from...

SCIENCE FICTION DOUBLE FEATURE

Michael Rennie was ill
The day the earth stood still
But he told us where we stand

The Day the Earth Stood Still was the 1951 classic directed by Robert Wise (*The Sound of Music*) and featuring Gort the robot and Michael Rennie in a career-best performance as Klaatu, a benevolent alien hoping to bring world peace.

And Flash Gordon
was there
In silver
underwear

Long before the space opera with music by Queen, cinemagoers were thrilled by Olympic swimmer Larry 'Buster' Crabbe attempting to thwart Ming the Merciless on the planet Mongo in three multi-part serials. They still screened to overexcited, sugar-high kids in Saturday matinees up to the eighties. A major influence on George Lucas for *Star Wars*, right down to the opening 'story so far' crawl.

Claude Raines was
the invisible man

Following on from the success of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, Universal Pictures and director James Whale adapted H.G. Wells' classic in 1933 with Claude Rains (later to also portray *The Phantom of the Opera* and *The Wolf Man*'s dad) in the lead. Not that you saw much of him.

Then
something
went wrong
For Fay Wray
and King Kong,
They got
caught in a
celluloid jam

Another iconic film from the thirties, *King Kong* pitted a stop-motion ape against New York, all for the love of a girl - Fay Wray, in this instance, becoming cinema's first scream queen. A beloved masterpiece that still thrills to this day. It was beauty killed the beast.

Then at a deadly pace
It came from outer space,
And this is how the message ran

It Came from Outer Space was another sci-fi tale that depicted aliens not as conquerors but merely as travellers wanting to go home. This 1953 Jack Arnold film comes from a story by the legendary Ray Bradbury.

Science Fiction, Double Feature
Dr X will build a creature.

Made in 1932, *Dr X* was an early colour film (although a black and white version was actually shot separately!) starring Lionel Atwill as the head of an institute in which one of the scientists is suspected of being a cannibalistic killer. Directed by Michael Curtiz (*Casablanca*), and featuring Fay Wray once more, it's one of the greatest horror movies that you probably haven't seen. A sequel with no connection whatsoever, *The Return of Dr X* was released in 1939 starring Humphrey Bogart. However, it's more than likely that the Dr X in the song is a catch-all title for the mad scientist trope.

it exists in its own right. It is thoroughly and unapologetically itself. That comes across in the fan base. It's rare to have such a welcoming atmosphere. The transgression isn't about cruelty or one-upmanship: it's about the freedom to be yourself however that looks to other people. Everyone's invited to the party. And we need that message now as much as we did 45 years ago.

On the subject of not needing to take a genre test to enjoy the film, legend Sue Blane, MBE didn't do any research for the costumes and ended up creating through *Rocky Horror* the template for punk rock fashion. If she had been too swept up in studying all the films that came before and getting it 'right' that way, the look of *Rocky Horror* might not have been iconic.

> **"The transgression isn't about cruelty or one-upmanship: it's about the freedom to be yourself however that looks to other people."**

DON'T DREAM IT - BE IT

The one bit of research that did make a difference to the recipe of *Rocky Horror* came from O'Brien flicking through a lingerie catalogue and discovering the slogan that would inspire perhaps the most famous motto of all: *Don't Dream It, Be It*. "*It appealed to me instantly. Especially being a transgendered person and seeing this page full of drawn pictures of girls who look very like transsexuals rather than women.*

The strapline at the top was 'don't dream it, be it' and I just thought oh yes, that's the way." It was permission for a lot of other people to start thinking the same.

WHEN SHALL WE RETURN TO TRANSYLVANIA?

We never really left. Screenings with shadow casts, tours of the stage version, three conventions, and a *Rocky Horror* package available at Oakley Court, Frank's house and now an exclusive hotel, running (bar lockdown) to this day. Not bad for what was at first considered a box office flop that went on to be one of the most influential musicals of all time. Potential sequels were less lucky. *Revenge of the Old Queen* was written but unmade. *Shock Treatment* (1981) was Richard O'Brien's official sequel to *Rocky Horror*, which in the advent of reality TV now feels terrifyingly predictive yet, at the time, didn't meet with the same fascination, perhaps because the people of Brad and Janet's hometown of Denton's collective greed for fame and money generated less sympathy - let alone sex appeal - than Frank's greed for pleasure. A Fox TV remake came and went in 2016, failing to capture what was revolutionary, transgressive, and true about the original. Yet *Rocky Horror*'s following has never stopped doing the *Time Warp* again, reflecting the genius of its recipe of inbuilt nostalgia and joy for life. Love or hate audience participation, it reflects the success of the recipe that everyone's invited to the party. We may, as Charles Gray concludes as the Criminologist, be "*lost in time, and lost in space... and meaning*" but we are bloody well going to enjoy ourselves.

See androids
fighting Brad and
Janet.
Anne Francis
stars in
Forbidden Planet

Forbidden Planet (1956) also starred Walter Pidgeon and a pre-comedy Leslie Nielson, as well as the iconic Robbie the Robot. The story was loosely based on William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Anne Francis was also known for being the high-tech private eye Honey West.

At the late night, double feature
picture show.

I knew Leo G.
Carroll was over
a barrel
When Tarantula
took to the hills

Atomic horrors were the flavour of the day in the fifties, and *Tarantula* was among the best. As well as the titular giant arachnid, this Jack Arnold film also included B-movie superstar John Agar and Alfred Hitchcock regular Leo G. Carroll succumbing to acromegaly, brought on by tampering with growl serums. Keep your eyes peeled for an early appearance from Clint Eastwood!

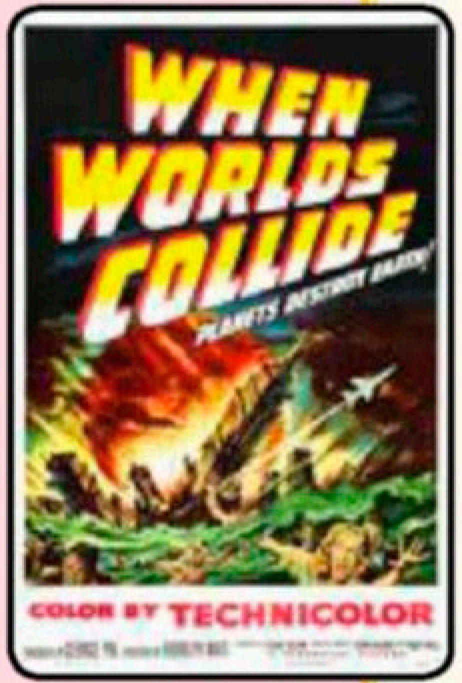
And I really got hot
When I saw Janette Scott
Fight a Triffid that spits poison and kills

John Wyndham's terrifying novel *The Day of the Triffids* was brought to the screen in 1961, starring Howard Keel (better known for appearing in musicals). Janette Scott (the daughter of Thora Hird, fact fans!) appeared in a subplot set in a lighthouse. Apparently, these scenes were added after the film was completed as it ran too short!

Dana Andrews said prunes
Gave him the runes
And passing them used lots of skills

The 1957 Jacques Tourneur movie *Night of the Demon* - a genuine classic of cinema - was based on M.R. James' story *Casting the Runes*. In the film version, Dana Andrews (once a shining star in Hollywood) is slipped a piece of paper containing runic symbols and a curse that he will die within a set time. He must pass on the paper to reverse the hex. He doesn't eat any prunes in the version of the film that was released.

But "When worlds collide"
Said George Pal to his bride
"I'm going to give you some terrible thrills"



This 1951 sci-fi flick is a glorious example of nihilistic cinema, which has the imminent destruction of Earth and the frantic scramble to find another planet to inhabit (and no doubt pollute). George Pal was the visionary producer here, but he also later directed *The Time Machine* in 1960.

Like a
Science Fiction, Double Feature
Dr X will build a creature
See androids fighting Brad and Janet
Anne Francis stars in Forbidden Planet
At the late night, double feature
picture show
I want to go
To the late night double feature picture show
By RKO

RKO Pictures was an independent studio who hoped to rival MGM and Universal, but ended up being known for B-movies. Several stone-cold classics were produced by the company though, including *King Kong* (1933) and *Citizen Kane* (1941). The studio's logo, a pylon atop a globe, would also be the backdrop of the floor show at the conclusion of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, with Rocky carrying a deceased Frank to the top à la Kong and Fay Wray.

RKO
Radio Picture

To the late night, double feature
picture show
In the back row
To the late night double feature
picture show.

Lyrics copyright: Richard O'Brien

This issue, the mercenary Martin Unsworth gets his head mashed by Tom Paton's THE ASCENT...

DON'T GO DOWN...

Writer/director Tom Paton has been making a name for himself over the years. His latest project, *G-LOC* is featured within these very pages. But we want to take you back to his production of 2019, *The Ascent*. Originally premiered at FrightFest as *Stairs*, it's also gone by the name of *Black Ops* in some territories. None of the titles really depict how much of a mind-fuck the film is, however.

The action begins with a group of eight special ops mercenaries, dubbed the Hell's Bastards, tasked with recovering intelligence from an undisclosed camp in the midst of a foreign civil war. Something that they should not be interfering with. Their orders are to kill everyone in the camp, but Jack (Toby Osmond) and Kia (Samantha Schnitzler) discover that there's a bound and gagged civilian (Julia Szamalek) in one of the tents. Obviously scared, she bites off the tip of Jack's finger (there's no big special effects required here since Osmond misses that digit already). Enraged that there's someone still living, the highest ranking officer, Will (former winner of *The X-Factor* and *Coronation Street* star Shayne Ward), plagued by regrets of a past mission where he made the wrong decision, pulls his gun on Kia and orders her to execute her. Against her better judgment and compassion, Kia obliges. Not before the Polish prisoner can utter ominously, "*Don't go down*".

> **"It's akin to being stuck in an Escher painting."**

Back in the UK, the group head over to their HQ to debrief, only to find the lift out of order. Begrudgingly, they take the stairs. The stairwell is cold, concrete, and uninviting; worse than any multi-storey you could imagine. The only thing that's lacking is the human faeces in the corner and discarded syringes. As they're partway up, they stop to take a breather since the stairs appear to be never-ending. One of the team, Hayley (Alana Wallace) was shot during their mission, but Will won't let her stay where she is. She must continue with them. Suddenly, the place is swamped in red light, with alarms ringing. The whole building shakes as if hit by a massive earthquake - or worse. Their pilot, Shaun (Simon Meacock), offers to go down to check if he can see what's happened. A scream cries out and Shaun reappears, slumping down, using his last breath, he spits out a warning to the rest: "*Run...*"

Climbing more flights, they come across a door. Weapons raised, they enter only to find themselves back in the blue-tinged camp where their mission took place. Everything playing out just as it had done before. Only this time, instead of taking the camp themselves, they are observing it all taking place. Retreating back to the stairwell, they have to make a decision: do they risk going back down and face the spectre of the civilian killed under Will's orders. They can't beat the supernatural, so they have to head back out into the camp. Reading the documents recovered from their mission, they find that the prisoner was held at the camp for some time, and there were orders that she was not to be killed. The enemy noted that she was nicknamed 'the prophet of death'. As in-fighting breaks out between the Hell's Bastards, it becomes clear that they have been given a chance to alter the chain of events: they must do what they can to stop the prisoner from being killed.

When STARBURST visited the set of *The Ascent* back in 2018, writer/director Tom Paton told us his idea for the nightmarish stairwell was akin to being stuck in an Escher painting. The solid cast - bolstered by the superb Bentley Kalu (who must have been feeling a slight sense of déjà vu following his appearance in *Edge of Tomorrow*) - sell the concept well.

The film makes use of *Call of Duty*-style shooter POV shots to great effect during the numerous attempts to correct the mistake of executing the prisoner. As we see the raid from different viewpoints, we get a glimpse into the enemy side. They execute innocent villagers using the same excuse Will does for killing the prophet:

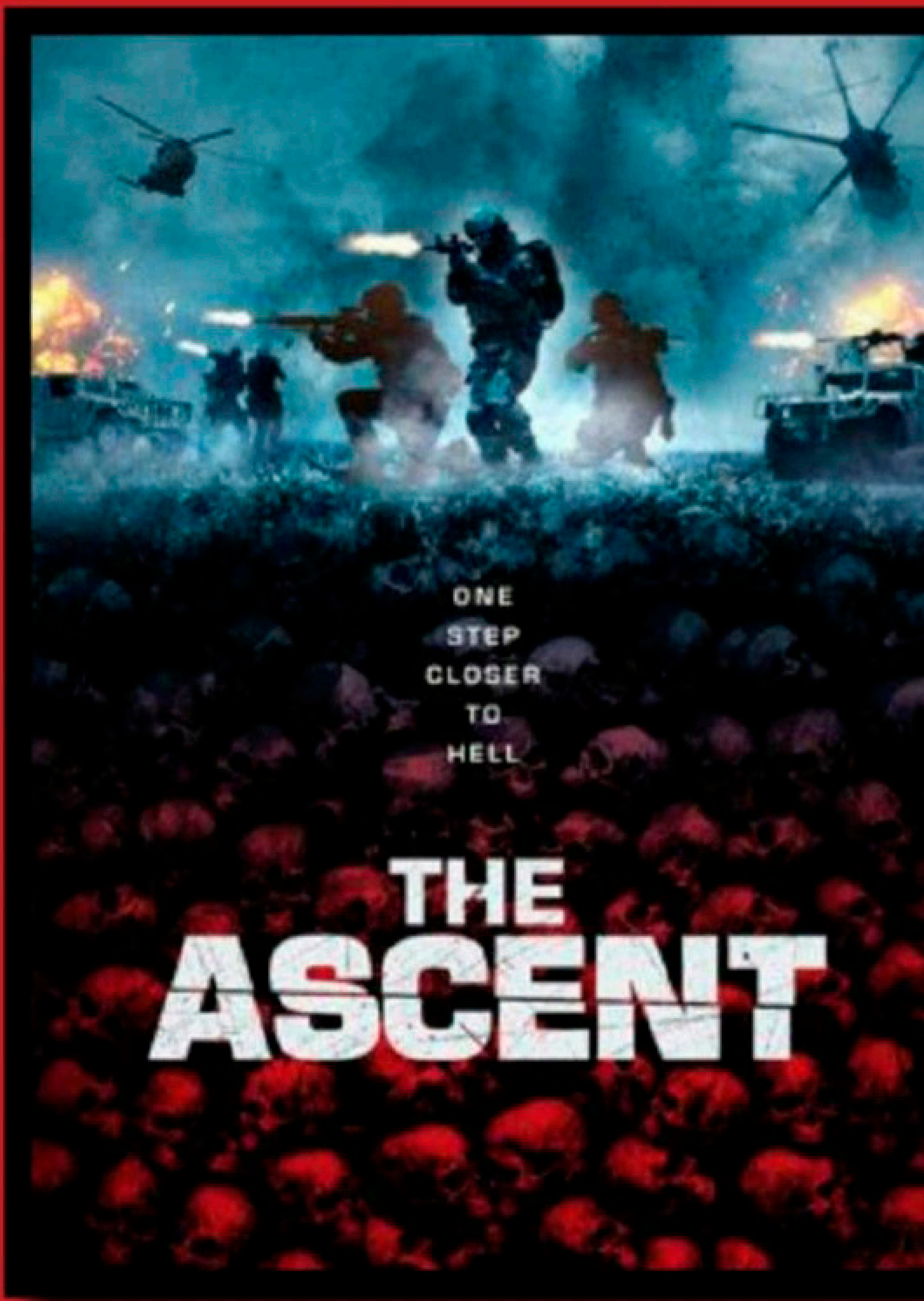
"*Orders are orders*". It's a poignant indictment about the futility of war as the team must re-tread their steps; the stairwell acting as their purgatory.

> ***"I did stunt training for Fast and Furious Live and I got the taste for it."***

While we were on set, actor Alana Wallace told us how excited she was about playing the role of a mercenary: "*I fell in love with the script and I was really drawn to Haley. I did stunt training for Fast and Furious Live and I got the taste for it. When I read the script for this I was impressed by the opportunity to play an action-orientated character. I had to do a lot of training for the film because it's very physical.*" Even though her character is wounded during the initial raid, she still takes an active role in the mind-twisting activity the ever-dwindling crew must undertake to get their freedom.

The message *The Ascent* gives us is powerful and clear. The decisions people make have consequences, and if you don't do the right thing the first time - even if it means disobeying orders - you won't have the option of repeating until you do. Regret can build up and cause even bigger mistakes. Make the right choice first time as you never know what hell you will bring upon yourself.

THE ASCENT gets its UK TV premiere on Horror Channel on October 23rd. Sky 317, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138.



THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE...

by Ed Fortune
and
Anne-Louise Fortune

STARBURST reports from the set of SIMON PEGG and NICK FROST's upcoming paranormal TV show, TRUTH SEEKERS...

When we heard that Nick Frost and Simon Pegg were working together on a new series for Prime Video called *Truth Seekers*, we simply had to know more. It's pitched as a mix of *Spaced*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *The X-Files*. It also has a stunning cast of brilliant new talent and some well-known faces, which is why we found ourselves on a cold Monday morning at a disused Shredded Wheat factory somewhere on the outskirts of London.

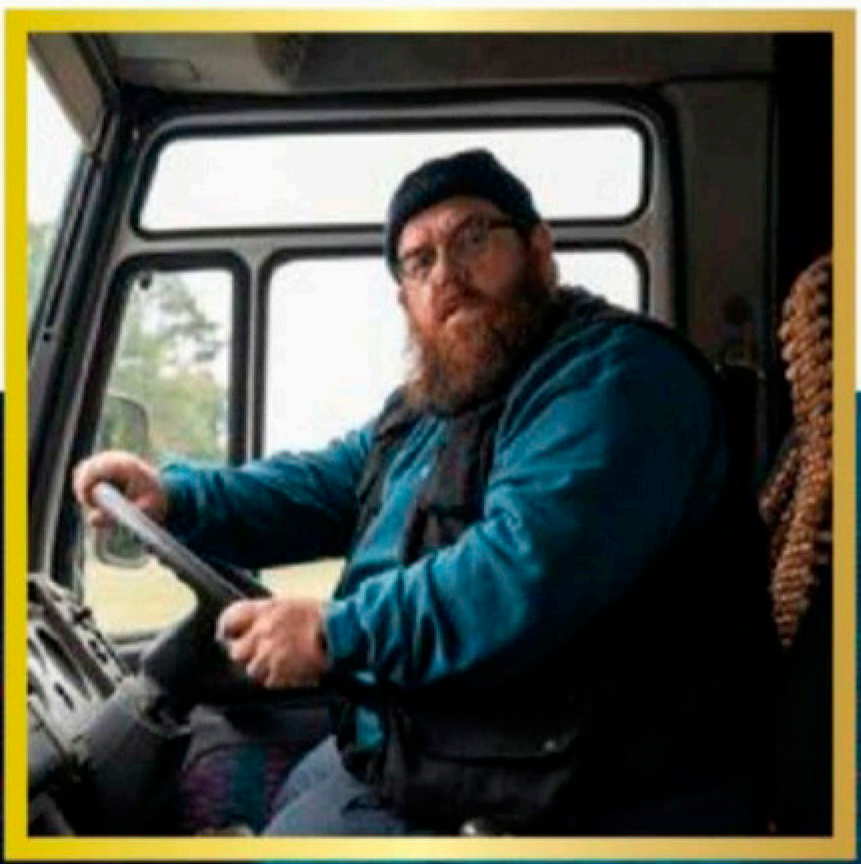
As we arrive, Nick Frost and his fellow actors are in the middle of one the show's critical scenes. Things are about to go down big time, and the show's plucky band are heroes are psyching themselves up. They look an awful lot like a very British version of The Scooby Gang, provided you swap out the dog for Nick. Part of this is because they're all crowded around a van. This vehicle has been used in a great many TV series and films, but for *Truth Seekers*, it has been rigged to look like a Broadband Support vehicle. Inside, there are tonnes of spook-busting goodies.

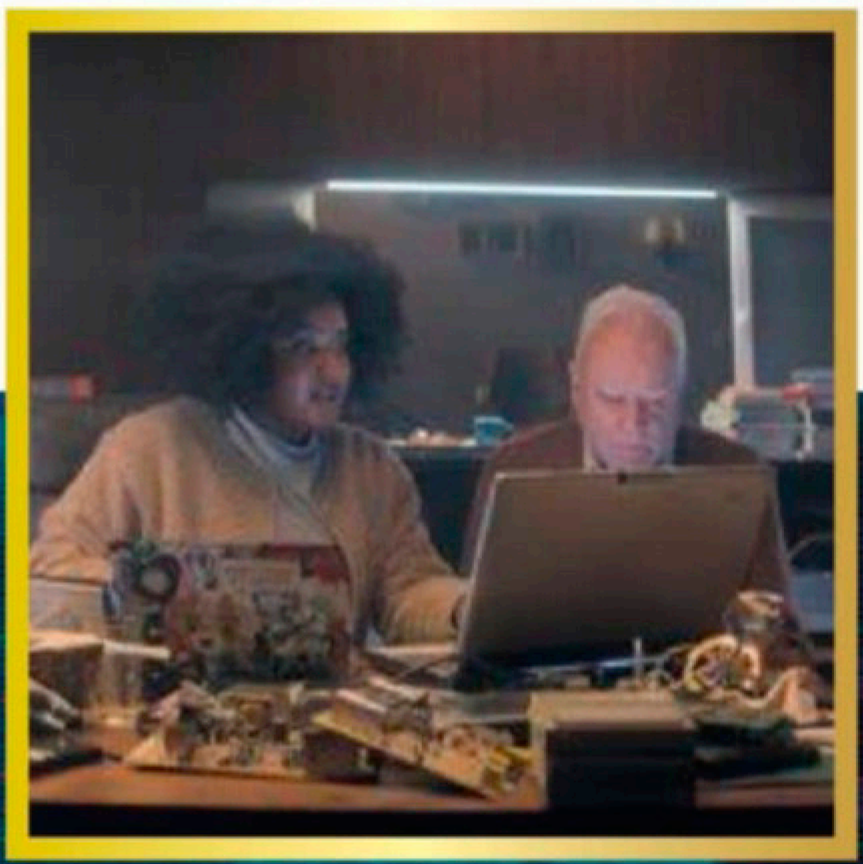
> “I'M THINKING OF IT AS A SUBURBAN GHOSTBUSTERS.”
> *- MALCOLM MCDOWELL*

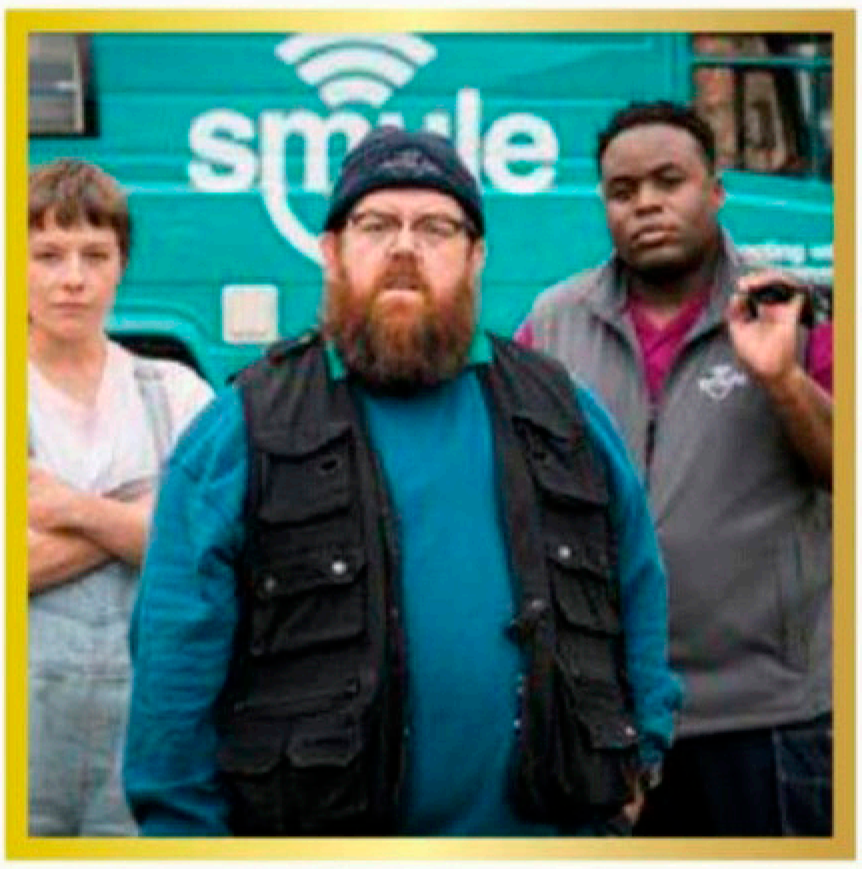
As well as the cast, there's half the crew, including the camera operator. Hovering out of shot are a dozen or so other people watching on monitors, comparing what they see with continuity images, or waiting to rush in and touch up makeup when 'cut' is called. Everyone is relaxed. Then filming begins. A jaunty tune (known as *The Lincolnshire Poacher*) plays. The cast and crew shiver; this creepy little ditty is an omen throughout the series and at this point into the filming, burned into everyone's memories.

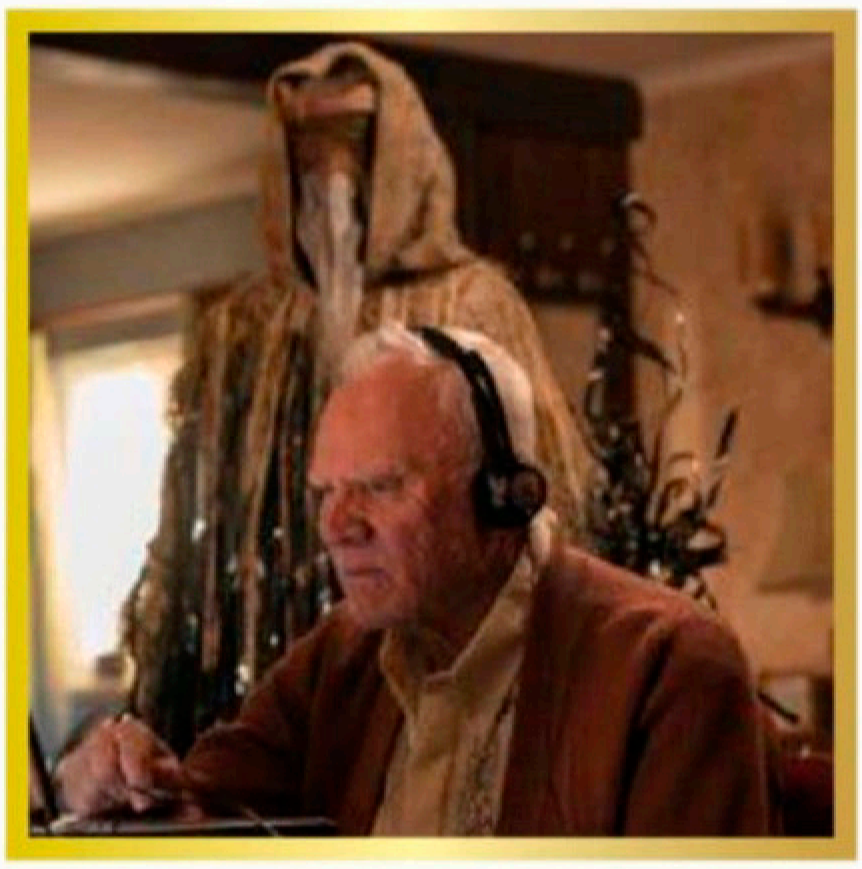
In a quiet moment, we catch up with Samson Kayo, who plays Elton, one of the Truth Seekers. We ask him if it's fair to describe the show as '*Scooby Doo* vs *Spaced*'. "*There's quite a bit of Ghostbusters in it as well.*" He tells us, "*Especially for me, with the comedic elements. But then it has these sombre and quite gripping, dramatic moments, which I really love. It gives it that parallel emotion to the madness. Elton is quite a lovable character, with some cool stuff. He wants to do good for everyone, but he doesn't want his past to haunt him. The key I think is for him to actually face it and overcome it because that's when you see some shit. He's got some crazy one-liners, and it was really fun to see those jokes land with the cast and the directors.*"

Malcolm McDowell plays Richard; an elderly gentleman cared for by Gus, Nick Frost's character. Malcolm is a striking and energetic figure, with a









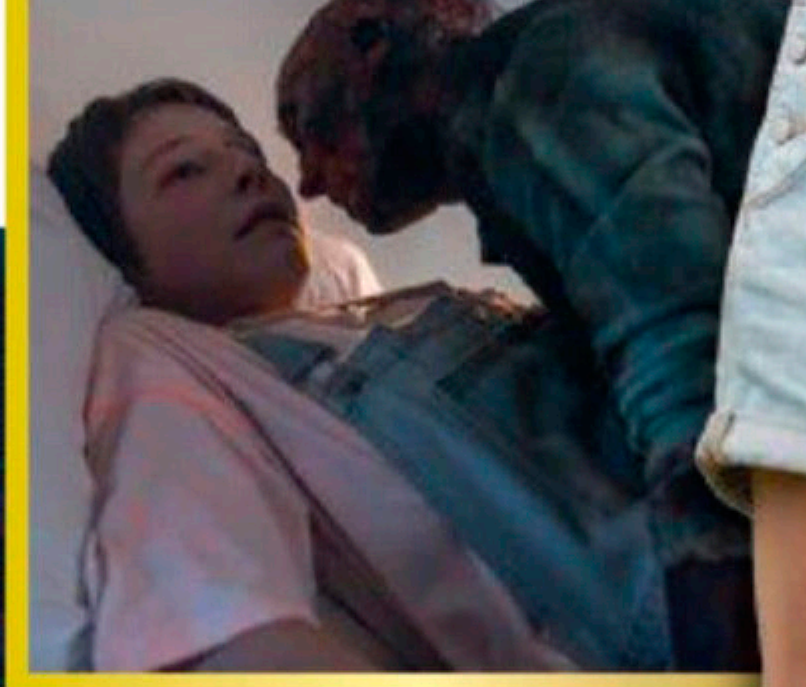
wealth of experience behind him and more than a touch of California.

He's clearly having a lot of fun being on a comedy show for a change. "*I'm thinking of it as a suburban Ghostbusters, but you know what I love? It's very quirky, very interesting. It's a nice change for me to be doing that kind of comedy, and it's also really nice to come back to London.*" Malcolm continues, "*That's what I'm enjoying the most. It's been terrific. And it's been a while since I've actually worked here. I did a Russian movie about three or four years ago, but it was a KGB spy thing from their point of view, which was sort of interesting. We shot in St. Petersburg and London, and they brought all the Russian crews to London. So it's nice to be here, it's so cosmopolitan, it's even more so than New York.*"

We ask him to tell us a bit more about Richard, his character in the show. "*I'm the sceptical one.*" The character really hammers home the show's themes: that of isolation and mystery. While talking about his career, we remind Malcolm of his one appearance in the *Star Trek* canon. "*I'm the man who dealt with Captain Kirk and, by the way, I feel like I did everyone a big favour.*"

The production team are keen to show us the site and the work they've done so far. It's been a long journey for the writers and producers of the project; even in 2020, it's tricky to convince people to invest in such a genre-specific show. Though clearly exhausted, there's an energy about the team that keeps it all going.

The disused factory, empty since 2008, is ideal as a backdrop for the series. It was considered for use in the HBO show *Chernobyl*, and we can see why. The building feels lonely, and curiously isolated, despite being in the centre of Welwyn Garden City. The shell of the building is falling into a state of dereliction, despite claims of developers who are seeking to redevelop the site and the remaining (listed) buildings into a mixed-use development of over 1000 'dwellings', designed to capitalise on a commute to Kings Cross, which takes



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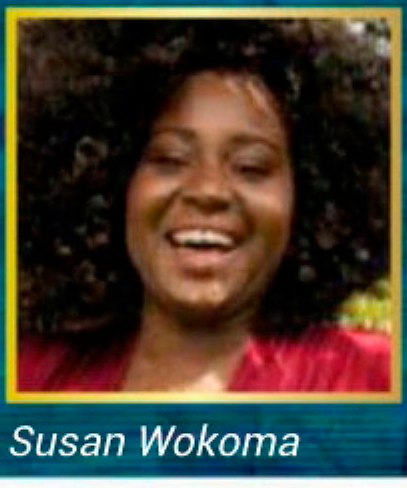
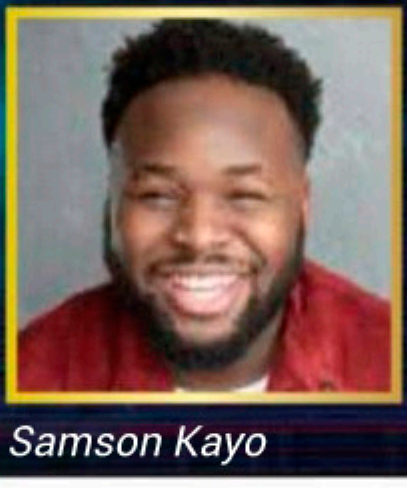
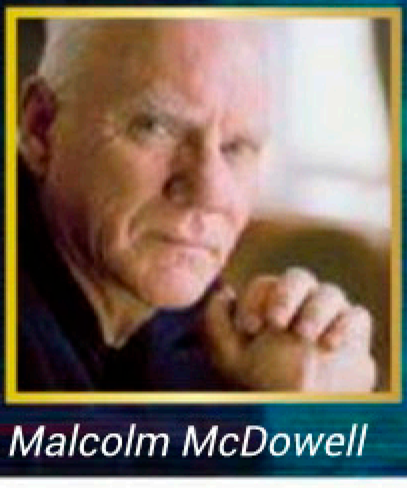
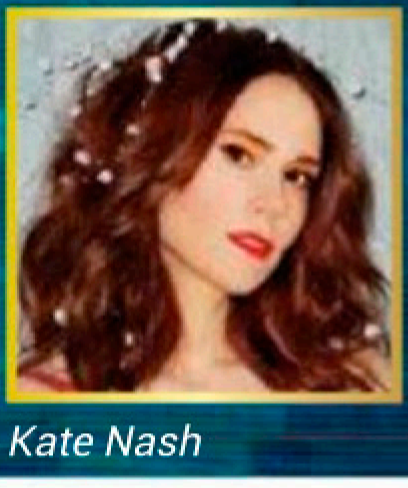
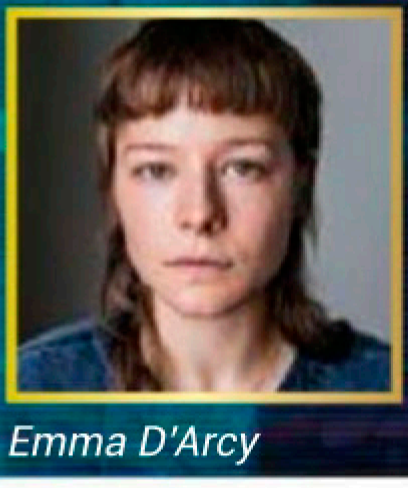

Susan Wokoma

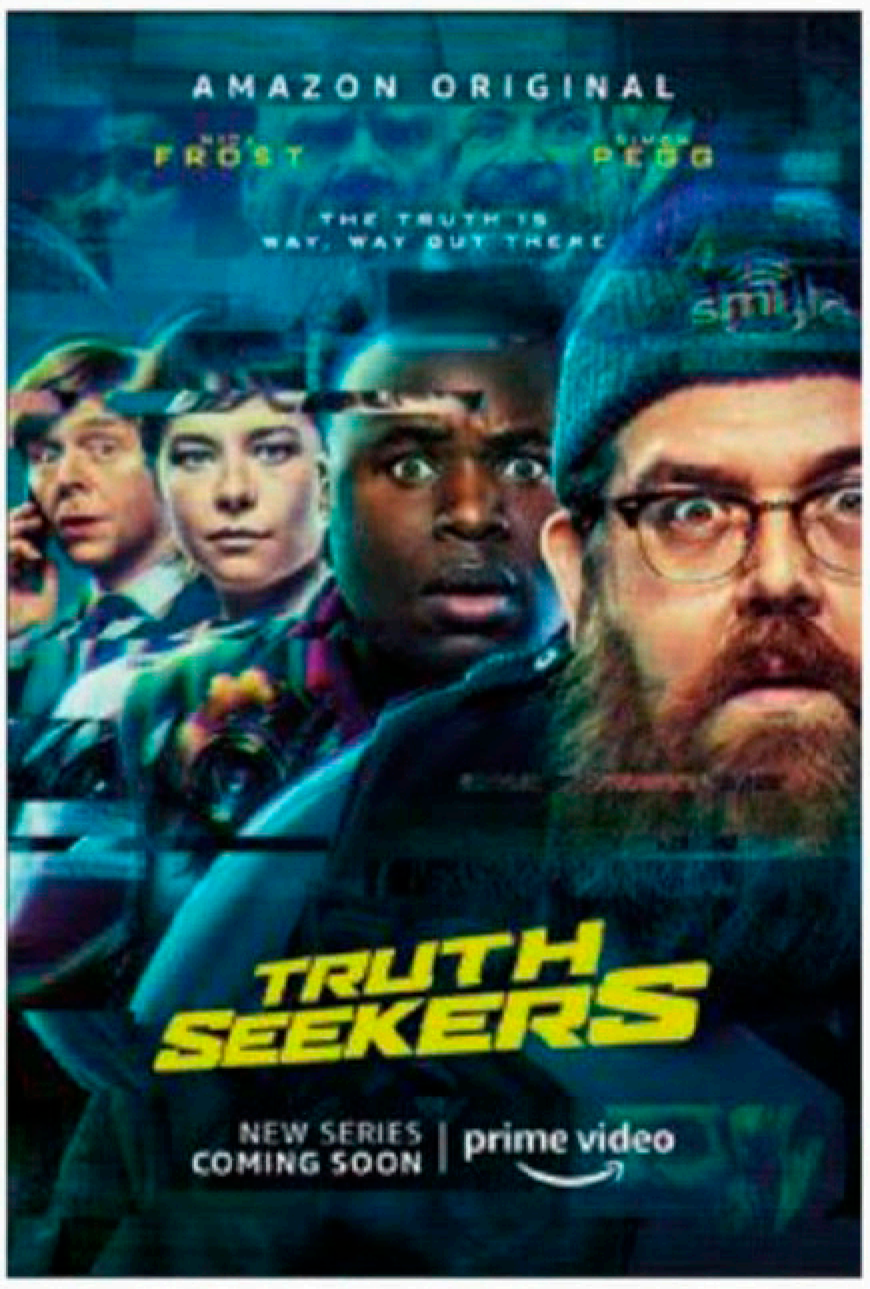

Samson Kayo


Malcolm McDowell


Kate Nash

Julian Barratt


Emma D'Arcy



only a fraction over 30 minutes. For the time being, though, the site is being allowed to degenerate slowly. We were shown around the ground floor of the mid-1920s factory, which is to be used the following day to film a key scene from the final episode. As we look around at the pieces of set the design team have installed, we note numerous buckets, positioned to collect water dripping in through the ceiling. Broken windows, abandoned industrial fittings and paint peeling off the gloriously sleek, modernist design supporting pillars all give the air of a building that offers so much potential, but which may yet only be allowed to be preserved on the small screen.

Susan Wokoma plays Helen, an agoraphobic YouTuber with thousands of followers and some serious issues with the outside world. The actor is best known for *CrazyHead* and *Year of the Rabbit*, and like all of the cast, she's having a lot of fun on set. "*I love this sort of stuff,*" she tells us, "*My only experience of this sort of thing was with Crazyhead. I love stuff that has rules to its world. If you do this, it means this, or if you see this, it means that. I love knowing all that sort of stuff. And so ever since that, I've been eager to do something like it again.*" Susan continues, "*It also means that you get to do stuff that you wouldn't normally necessarily do as an actor in terms of fight sequences, big explosions - like what I'm about to do. I get to do some cool stunts.*"

Susan also gets to team up with Nick Frost's character, Gus. "*Working with Nick was so much fun.*" She enthuses, "*He's so funny, I find it helpful when you have one of the creators on set with you because they're always quick to correct things if you do something and it doesn't quite ring right. I think it's more to do with the essence of the comedy and you get to build chemistry. The man is one hundred per cent funny bone.*"

Somewhere in this '*Supernatural* meets *Shaun of the Dead*'-style show hides a story concerning loss, isolation, and how people form a community in a modern world that is often unfriendly and appears to be forcing conformity. How do you become a part of a group, when the world scoffs at you and scorns you? How do people deal with grief when it's one of the last remaining taboo subjects of discussion? How do we use modern technology to fill the gaps in our lives?

> **"NICK FROST IS 100% FUNNY BONE."**
>
> *- SUSAN WOKOMA*

Truth Seekers may well contain 'buckets of blood', but it has a strong heart that raises this tale of a group of misfits beyond that of the Scooby Gang, to be a story of love, loss and redemption.

TRUTH SEEKERS will be released on Prime Video later this year. For more on the show, come back next issue for our interview with its co-creator and co-star SIMON PEGG.

ENTER A DOMAIN WHERE STRANGE IS NORMAL
AI
The Final Countdown
"WELL MADE, FASCINATING AND DAMNED SCARY"
PROJECT
BLUE BOOK
EXPOSED
FEATURING BEST SELLING AUTHOR AND UFO EXPERT
KEVIN RANDLE
LT. COL. USAR (RETIRED)
BEARDS
THE RISE OF
FACIAL HAIR
ALIEN
OVERLORDS
"HIGHLY ORIGINAL AND INVENTIVE. A MUST SEE"
KINGDOM OF BRUNEL
SECRET SOCIETIES
OCCULT POWER
"AS ABOVE SO BELOW"
AREA 51 EXPOSED
AREA 51
WARNING
NO TRESPASSING
DEATH VALLEY
ALIENS
"THEY ARE AMONG US."
CALIFORNIA
PARANORMAL
"RIVETING TESTIMONY FROM EYEWITNESSES"
ELUSIVE
BIGFOOT ABROAD
GET YOUR CONSPIRACY FIX ON AMAZON PRIME!

THE FRIGHT OF YOUR LIFE!

Words: Martin Unsworth

We caught up with filmmaker DAN BROWNLIE to chat about his documentary UK HAUNTERS, which looks at the people behind the immersive scare trade

STARBURST: Can you explain what a haunter is?

Dan Brownlie: What makes a haunter is very subjective, I guess. For me, and in terms of this documentary, it's anyone who is part of the scene that creates immersive experiences that cater to lovers of horror, the bizarre, and boundary-pushing entertainment. They are composers, FX artists, actors, haunt creators, and artists who choose horror themes to express themselves in a real-life immersive canvas that revels in others taking part. Largely, these haunts and scare attractions take the form of the sort of thing that we traditionally associate with American Halloween theme parks' 'haunted houses', much like Universal Studio's Halloween Horror Nights. But they're also so much more varied than I was expecting.

What drew you to make the documentary?

While shooting my previous film *The Tombs* at the London Dungeon Tombs, I got chatting to Andy 'Cookie' Rawlings. In between the hectic shooting schedule, he showed me a lot of the tricks haunts use to terrify people and it fascinated me. I learnt about all the secret passages, fake walls, 'boo holes' - the hole in a wall where an actor will wait till you walk past and scare you - and all the other tricks they use. It was amazing learning the secrets and psychology of how they work, and it gave me a deeper understanding and respect for how they work and the craftsmanship that goes into them.

At the end of the shoot, we got chatting, and I said how much I loved haunts, and he started telling me about all these other UK haunts. I'm a lifelong horror fan and lover of haunts who had no idea that the UK had such a thriving scene. I thought if I love haunts this much and didn't know they existed, then there must be an army of people like me out there who also didn't know.

At this time, I was looking for my next project. One that I could have complete control over. Having grown tired of the producer types taking my film, reshaping it, throwing it back at me to fix, just before taking it so they could mess with it again. I decided to create a documentary to show the world what I could find. I had complete artistic freedom to do what I want. I wanted to discover the scene and share my discoveries as I was doing it, which is what I found so interesting about this documentary. The viewer experiences these things along with me, through the eyes of an uncensored haunt fan.

What was the most terrifying attraction you found?

I don't think that's what this doc is really about. The range of haunts was amazing, and I think judging them purely on terror factor underwrites the ingenuity of the others. You see, they are all so different. Rick Jones of HorrifyMe - who does horror photography - is there to make you into the scary thing, not to scare you. Broadwitch Hauntfest is a more traditional-style scare maze haunted house. And then you have Faceless Ventures, which pushes boundaries and has helped people use their fears to progress through personal trauma. I couldn't even tell you which one I thought was the best. What I found was a scene that goes way beyond just scaring people, it's artistic, therapeutic, and fun as well as very scary. I will say Broadwitch Hauntfest made me scream the most!

> "The only situations that I uncovered about things getting out of hand were all down to customers being a-holes!"

Some attractions allow the actors to touch visitors - did you hear any stories about that going wrong?
The only situations that I uncovered about things getting out of hand were all down to customers being a-holes! Unfortunately, there tends to be a type of person who likes to go into haunts and push around the scare actors or lash out when they get scared. Why they do it is beyond me, maybe they can't handle being scared or are trying to act tough. Either way, it's completely unacceptable - they shouldn't attend these events. The 'extreme' event that I covered where people could touch you was Cracked/Faceless Ventures, and they were such lovely people who had everything under control. The thing about haunts and scare attractions is that they are very safe places. The only times I ever heard of something going wrong is people acting out of line.

How did you persuade your wife, also your producer, to take part in the haunts?
My wife hates being touched in haunts. *Hates* it. I can't remember the exact words I used, but it was something along the lines of "Well I can't do it, I need to work the camera". In all fairness, I could have filmed one of the people who wanted to go through it, but where is the fun in that, eh?

Did you get any ideas for future films?
Yes, I did! This one was shot in a vlog/found footage style, partly due to practicality and partly due to the fact I love it as a genre. There's so much you can do with it, as the recent Shudder film *Host* shows, and when done correctly, really adds an interesting dimension that can play with the reality of the viewer and taps into modern-day watching sensibilities. I'm currently developing a found footage script with an amazing producer [Stuart Brennan] that I'm exceptionally excited about shouting about as soon as I can. This doc was very experimental in terms of my 'why the hell not try' logic of shooting that allowed me to play with the found footage aspect of it. This free reign of expression has given me a greater understanding of found footage, which I can't wait to explore more in the next film.

How do you think scare attractions will evolve or even survive post-COVID-19?
They will survive. Like the Halloween season itself, and the ghouls that often lurk in the darkened corners, it just keeps coming back stronger. There have been a lot of unfortunate closures this year as no one saw this situation coming. Government guidelines were shaky at best, and at the end of the day, this is safe fun, so the haunts that cannot put the right restrictions in place have done the sad but responsible thing and shut down for the season. But haunts and scare attractions evolve like they always do. I've heard of drive-through haunts in Japan. A friend of mine in America said his haunt is opening, but they're using Plexiglas to separate the actors and the customers. Some year-long haunts have managed to put the measures in place to reopen. Faceless Ventures is looking at doing a week-long online experience. So they are evolving as we speak.

UK HAUNTERS is available on DVD from Worldwide Multimedia.

telephemera

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ON THE AIR

In the summer of 1991, David Lynch was at a crossroads. *Wild at Heart* had been an enormous critical success, but the same could not be said of the second season of *Twin Peaks*, which had endured declining ratings and network indifference to limp to its denouement in June. Not wanting to turn his back on either the town of Twin Peaks or the medium of television, Lynch – and partner Mark Frost – forged ahead with two different projects.

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me was the director's big-screen continuation of the popular series, but since it was told entirely in flashback it offered no new advancement to the way things were left at the end of Season 2. Consequently, the film was a critical and commercial failure, although it came to be reassessed as time passed, and later critics have lauded the movie as one of the director's finest.

Production of *Fire Walk with Me* overlapped with the creation of a new television show, once again for ABC despite the mishandling of the final few episodes of *Twin Peaks* Season 2. Perhaps reflecting their difficult relationship with the network, Lynch and Frost set the new show in the world of TV, albeit at the birth of the medium, and told the story of Lester Guy, a washed-up Hollywood star given a final chance to resurrect his career with an eponymous TV variety show.

Frost was reported to have based the show on his father's experiences in the nascent medium in the 1950s, where shows were aired live, mistakes and all, and thought it ripe for comedic exploration. He and Lynch wrote the show with a cast in mind, largely those they'd worked with on *Twin Peaks* and *Wild at Heart*, building a repertory company that included Ian Buchanan, Miguel Ferrer, Marvin Kaplan, and David Lander, and consolidated that cast with veterans of sitcom and variety TV.

ABC was impressed with the pilot episode, which was set on the fictional show's opening night, and gave the go ahead for a short season of seven episodes, with subsequent episodes largely focused around later episodes of *The Lester Guy Show*. By the time Lynch and Frost were filming the series proper, however, their relationship with ABC began to fall apart, with subtle (and not so subtle) references bleeding into the script, and when it came to schedule the show for the fall 1992 season, ABC plonked it in a dead zone, 9.30pm on a Saturday night.

It's said that the one thing that cemented the Lynch-Frost partnership was their shared sense of humour, and this is on display for the world to see in *On the Air*, unfiltered and out of step with any other network comedy showing in (albeit a weekend) prime time. This is the comedy of Murphy's Law – what can go wrong *will* go wrong – and each episode is filled with ineptitude, slapstick, sight gags, and Guy being outdone by his 'dim bulb' sidekick Betty Hudson.

ALAN BOON DELVES INTO THE TELEVISION ARCHIVES TO UNEARTH ANOTHER LONG-FORGOTTEN CURIO...

Ian Buchanan played Lester Guy with a world-weary spite, and the actor's experience on shows such as *General Hospital* and *The Garry Shandling Show* were brought to the fore, his knowledge of precious star players and offbeat comedy feeding into the heady mix created by Lynch, Frost, and their *Twin Peaks* writing partner Robert Engels. Guy is aware this is his last chance, and is determined to make sure that his star shines brightly, even if it means he has to undermine Betty at every turn, which often ends up in her favour.

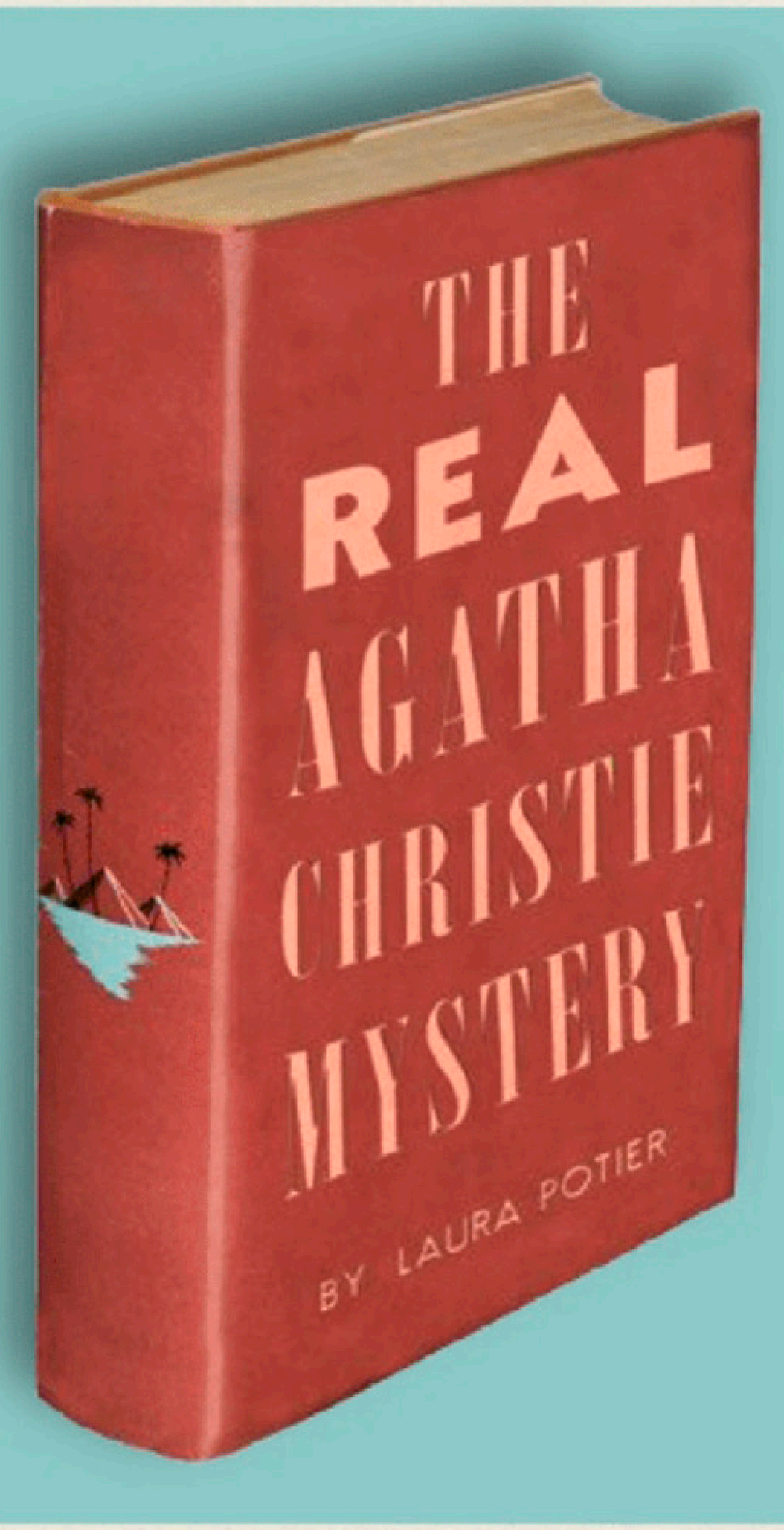
Save for Episode 2, each features an episode of *The Lester Guy Show*, with a cavalcade of special guests brought on to perform their turn with the hopes of hitting big with viewers at home. These become increasingly bizarre, from Professor R. Answer (the man with the highest IQ ever recorded) and Doodles the Duck, who meets a grisly end, to beatnik street poets and Lester's favourite gypsy magician, their appearances on the show managing to ruin Lester's plans and leave the plotters transformed into lizards or transported to Akron, Ohio. Alongside the main plotlines are side stories for Snaps the Dog, the show's canine mascot and representative of the sponsors, Welby Snap's dog food. Snaps has run-ins with his handler, plays the bongos, falls in love with a doomed Pomeranian, and trades personalities with the show's producer, Dwight McGonigle. He is also present in most of the visions experienced by 'Blinky' Watts, the show's sound effects man, who suffers from 'Bozeman's Simplex', a condition that means he sees 25.62 times more than regular people. Blinky's inclusion was Lynch's reaction to network criticism of his use of blind characters in *Twin Peaks*, theorising that if they didn't like characters who couldn't see then they could have a character who could see *too much*.

The rest of the cast is filled with a delightful parade of oddities, including a seemingly impervious to harm giant, a pair of conjoined twins who tell everyone to "hurry up," and a set of network executives watching the show from a velvet roped-off section, sometimes shown to be sleeping through the recording, and even once replaced by a row of ducks. Lynch and Frost were obviously not enjoying their TV experience.

The network were also souring on their relationship with the pair, and after the chaotic scheduling of the final episodes of *Twin Peaks* they all but gave up on *On the Air*. Episode 1 aired on June 20th,1992, and received the expected low ratings in its poor timeslot. Despite being in receipt of all seven episodes, ABC aired only two more – weirdly, Episodes 3 and 5 – before yanking it from the schedules, never to be seen again. The show did better in international markets, with BBC2 showing all seven episodes in the summer of 1993, albeit at a *very* late night slot, and there was even a limited (and highly prized) VHS release in the UK.

On the Air marked the end of the Lynch and Frost partnership (at least until 2017's *Twin Peaks* revival), and Frost took time out from producing and directing to write books while Lynch forged ahead with another TV project, *Hotel Room*, for the more accommodating HBO, before writing and directing *Lost Highway*. He did prepare another property for TV, but it was clear that it wouldn't get the treatment it deserved and so *Mulholland Drive* instead emerged as a movie in 2001.

Perhaps even more than *Twin Peaks*, *On the Air* is the quintessential David Lynch TV show, an expression of his bizarre take on Americana, laugh out loud funny, and wilfully obscure. Almost forgotten by all but the most hardcore Lynch devotees (and those UK night owls who vaguely remember seeing it when it aired in 1993), it has never been released on DVD, despite calls from loyal fans, but with the network seemingly not caring about it from the day it was born, it can be found on video sharing sites without too much trouble. Blazing a trail for shows like *The Larry Sanders Show* and *30 Rock*, and the auteur-guided shows of the streaming era, *On the Air* is as magical as the Great Presidio himself.



THE REAL AGATHA CHRISTIE MYSTERY

BY LAURA POTIER

As the latest adaptation of DEATH ON THE NILE prepares to hit the big screen, we look back on a genuine incident that could have come straight from the author's books...

Despite a lukewarm reception at his last box office outing, Hercule Poirot (and his fantastic facial hair) is set to return to cinemas soon, abandoning the snowy landscapes of Eastern Europe for much warmer climates. With Kenneth Branagh both reprising his role as the famous Belgian detective and returning to the director's chair, *Death on the Nile* brings together another all-star cast that includes Gal Gadot, Letitia Wright, Armie Hammer, Emma Mackey, and Rose Leslie.

Written by murder-mystery author Agatha Christie in 1937, *Death on the Nile* sees Poirot embark on a vacation to Cairo, only to then find himself embroiled in two murder cases. While aboard a luxurious steamboat cruising the Nile, Linnet Doyle, a wealthy socialite, is murdered in her sleep after a falling-out with her close friend, Jacqueline de Bellefort, whose former fiancé she married. While the novel has Poirot aboard the same steamer by coincidence, the film may take a slightly different approach. At the end of 2017's *Murder on the Orient Express*, Poirot is asked to investigate a death in Egypt, which suggests Linnet (here played by Gal Gadot) may already be dead by the time Poirot makes his appearance. Regardless, the main plot is expected to unfold similarly to Christie's detective novel, which means audiences have a wealth of intrigue, romantic entanglements, and tragedy, mystery, and murder to look forward to this winter.

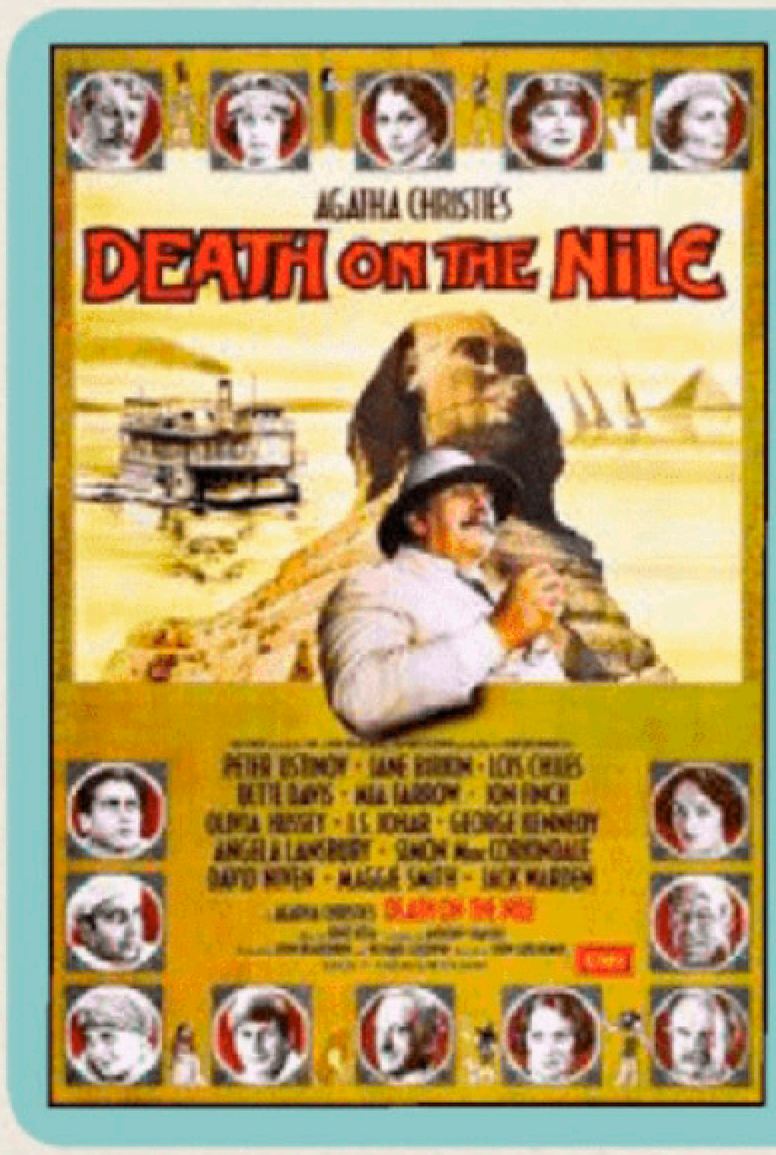
The project is the third screen adaptation of the Christie novel, following a 1978 movie that starred Peter Ustinov as Poirot alongside screen legends Jane Birkin, Bette Davis, Mia Farrow, and Lois Chiles, and a 2004 episode of *Agatha Christie's Poirot*. Agatha Christie's written works have proven perfect for big screen treatments, giving rise to four television series, dozens of TV movies and over forty feature films to date.

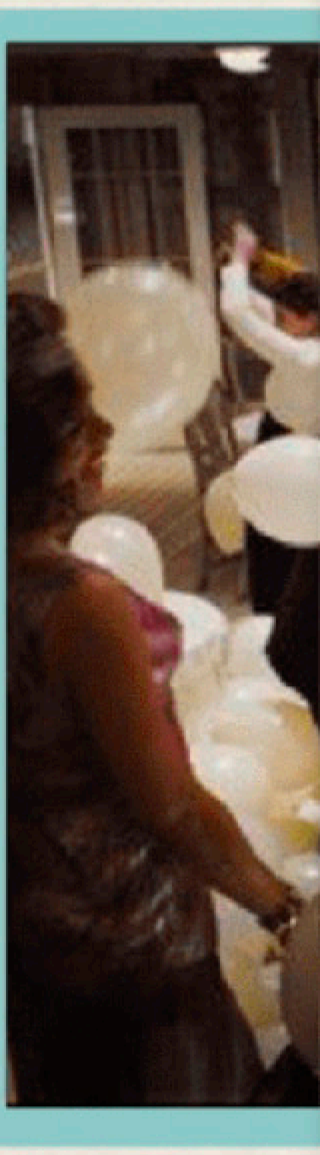
This is perhaps unsurprising given that Guinness World Records lists Christie as the best-selling fiction writer of all time, her novels having sold over two billion copies. The British author was best known for her expansive bibliography of sixty-six novels and fourteen short story collections, particularly those revolving around fictional detectives Miss Marple and the aforementioned Hercule Poirot. Her works soon earned her the title of 'Queen of Crime' for their immaculately plotted mysteries, characterisation, and suspense. Sophie Hannah, a poet and author who has written a number of continuation novels based on Christie's Poirot, explained that: *"At the start of each novel, Christie shows us an apparently impossible situation and we go mad wondering 'How can this be happening?' Then, slowly, she reveals how the impossible is not only possible but the only thing that could have happened."*

When it came to her fiction, Christie often drew from real-life experiences. She served in hospital dispensaries during both World Wars, during which she acquired a thorough understanding of poisons and the medical field, knowledge she then employed in her writing. Likewise, following her second marriage to archaeologist Max Mallowan in 1930, she took annual trips to dig sites in the Middle East, during which time she also travelled extensively. Such experiences clearly informed her writing in both *Death on the Nile* and *Murder on the Orient Express*.

Conversely, there was a time in Agatha Christie's life that may as well have been pulled straight from one of her detective novels, given the drama and strangeness of the event: the renowned author's disappearance in 1926. It was a cold night on December 3rd when then 36-year-old Agatha Christie left her Sunningdale home in Berkshire and drove towards Surrey. The next morning at 8 o'clock, her Morris Cowley was found abandoned on a steep slope at the edge of a chalk-pit in Newlands Corner, near Guildford, with only a fur coat and her driving license left behind. There was no sign of Christie, nor was there any evidence of an accident. The author would not be found for eleven days.

Her disappearance sparked an extensive manhunt, employing over 1000 police officers, 15,000 civilian volunteers and, for the very first time, aeroplanes. Speculation swirled around the circumstances of Christie's disappearance, conflicting accounts of events were reported, letters were received in suspicious circumstances, and rumours as to the reasons for her leaving ran rampant. Her marriage with Colonel Archibald Christie was said to be on the rocks, as she was aware of his ongoing affair with a younger woman by the name of Nancy Neele. Perhaps her husband had murdered her? Archie Christie stated to police that his wife had been suffering from a nervous breakdown, while others said she had been particularly happy in her home life. Some believed the whole ordeal to be a publicity stunt ahead of the release of her next work, *The Mystery of the Downs*, others thought suicide was probable or that she'd left home with no intention of returning. Even still, there were later theories that


AGATHA CHRISTIE'S
DEATH ON THE NILE
PETER USTINOV · JANE BIRKIN · LOIS CHILES
BETTE DAVIS · MIA FARROW · JON FINCH
OLIVIA HUSSEY · I.S. JOHAR · GEORGE KENNEDY
ANGELA LANSBURY · SIMON MacCORKINDALE
DAVID NIVEN · MAGGIE SMITH · JACK WARDEN

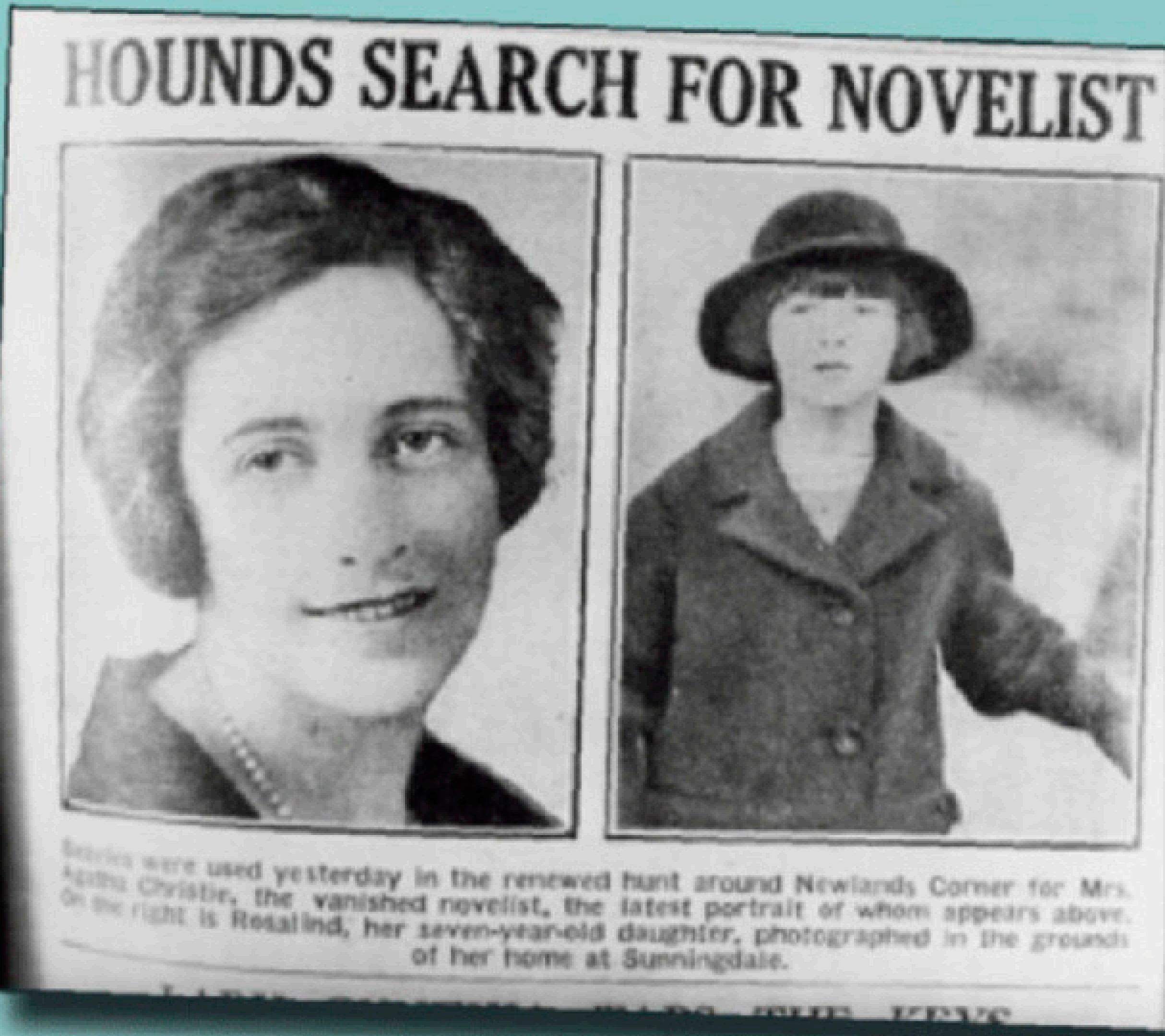


the author had orchestrated her own disappearance to ruin her husband's plans with his mistress that weekend.

Adding to the intrigue, close to where the car had been found was a natural spring known as the Silent Pool, which local folklore said was bottomless and where two young children were supposed to have drowned. After some days, the local police authorities began to suspect a case of suicide, despite receiving hundreds of letters from people claiming to have recognised the author. The tabloid appeal of Christie's disappearance was further compounded by the suggestion that Christie's Sunningdale home, which she shared with her husband, was haunted. According to The New York Times, the house "*stands in a lonely lane, unlit at night, which has a reputation of being haunted. The lane has been the scene of the murder of a woman and the suicide of a man and its tragic associations were felt by Mrs. Christie.*" She reportedly once told a friend that "*If I do not leave Sunningdale soon, Sunningdale will be the end of me.*"

> "Spiritualists held a séance with one of the mediums stating Christie had been victim to foul play."

The police halted their search some three days after her disappearance, when Christie's brother-in-law received a letter from her stating she was going to a Yorkshire spa 'for rest and treatment'. Soon after, however, the police resumed the hunt for Christie, unconvinced as they were by the letter. Then, another development: it was revealed Christie had left three letters. As well as the one to her brother-in-law, she left one to her secretary, and a third to her husband. Colonel Christie refused to reveal the contents of his letter, stating it was a personal note. It is generally understood that all three letters were sent before Christie's disappearance on December 3rd. Conflicting reports also circulated claiming two of the letters had been burned, and the one to her secretary apparently contained only scheduling instructions.
Yet another rumour claimed Agatha Christie had left behind a sealed envelope addressed to her secretary, to be opened only in the event her body was discovered.


HOUNDS SEARCH FOR NOVELIST

Beagles were used yesterday in the renewed hunt around Newlands Corner for Mrs. Agatha Christie, the vanished novelist, the latest portrait of whom appears above. On the right is Rosalind, her seven-year-old daughter, photographed in the grounds of her home at Sunningdale.

Amid the confusion, back-and-forth and lack of clear evidence, police grew desperate, enlisting the help of Christie's contemporaries, fellow crime writers Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Dorothy L. Sayers. Doyle, a keen occultist, attempted to use paranormal means to find Christie, bringing one of her gloves to a renowned medium with no success. Spiritualists even held a séance at the site of her abandoned car, with one of the mediums stating Christie had been victim to foul play. Sayers also visited the scene of the writer's disappearance in search of clues but was unable to provide answers. The police even brought Christie's terrier to the site and handed him one of her gloves, so that he might pick up her smell. After following the dog around for three hours, the police gave up on this search.

On December 14th, eleven days after she first went missing, Agatha Christie was found staying as a guest at the Harrogate Hydro spa under an assumed name. The spa was 230 miles from where her car had been abandoned. Her husband told The Times' reporter on the 17th that his wife "*is extremely ill, suffering from complete loss of memory. Three years have dropped out of her life... when she was shown a picture of herself and Rosalind, her little daughter, she asked who the child was.*" It turned out she had checked in under the name Mrs Teresa Neele, a name which Colonel Christie stated held no significance. Years later, it was revealed to be the name of his mistress. He would marry Miss Neele after Agatha Christie sued him for divorce in 1928.

DEATH ON THE NILE (2020)

Christie discussed her disappearance only once, in a 1928 interview with The Daily Mail. She explained she was driving past a quarry on that fateful day, when: "*There came into my mind the thought of driving into it. However, as my daughter was with me in the car, I dismissed the idea at once. That night I felt terribly miserable. I felt that I could go on no longer. I left home that night in a state of high nervous strain with the intention of doing something desperate. When I reached a point on the road, which I thought was near the quarry, I turned the car off the road down the hill toward it. I left the wheel and let the car run. The car struck something with a jerk and pulled up suddenly. I was flung against the steering wheel, and my head hit something. Up to this moment I was Mrs. Christie.*" From there, confused, and likely concussed, she caught a train to Waterloo, then from King's Cross to Harrogate, where she was found.

It has been over 90 years since these events, and biographers, historians, and amateur sleuths alike still debate what happened that December. Christie apparently refused to discuss the event with her close ones, and no mention of it appeared in her autobiography, released two years after her death in 1977.
The superintendent in charge of the investigation, William Kenward, is said to have burned all material relating to the case for unknown reasons. Meanwhile, biographers continue to present opposing narratives: among many others, Jared Cade claimed Christie had orchestrated the whole episode to win her husband back; Andrew Norman stated she suffered from a psychogenic fugue state brought on by stress; Andrew Wilson believes she considered suicide and felt so ashamed about it that she invented her amnesia. A dramatisation of the events made it to the screen in 1979 with Michael Apted's *Agatha*. Vanessa Redgrave played the author, with Timothy Dalton as her husband and Dustin Hoffman as an investigative journalist. The author's disappearance in 1926 is the one Agatha Christie mystery that continues to resist a neat and satisfactory conclusion.

DEATH ON THE NILE is in cinemas soon.

ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE EXAMINES THE EVER-EXPANDING PHENOMENON OF TABLE TOP GAMING

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE BIG BAD

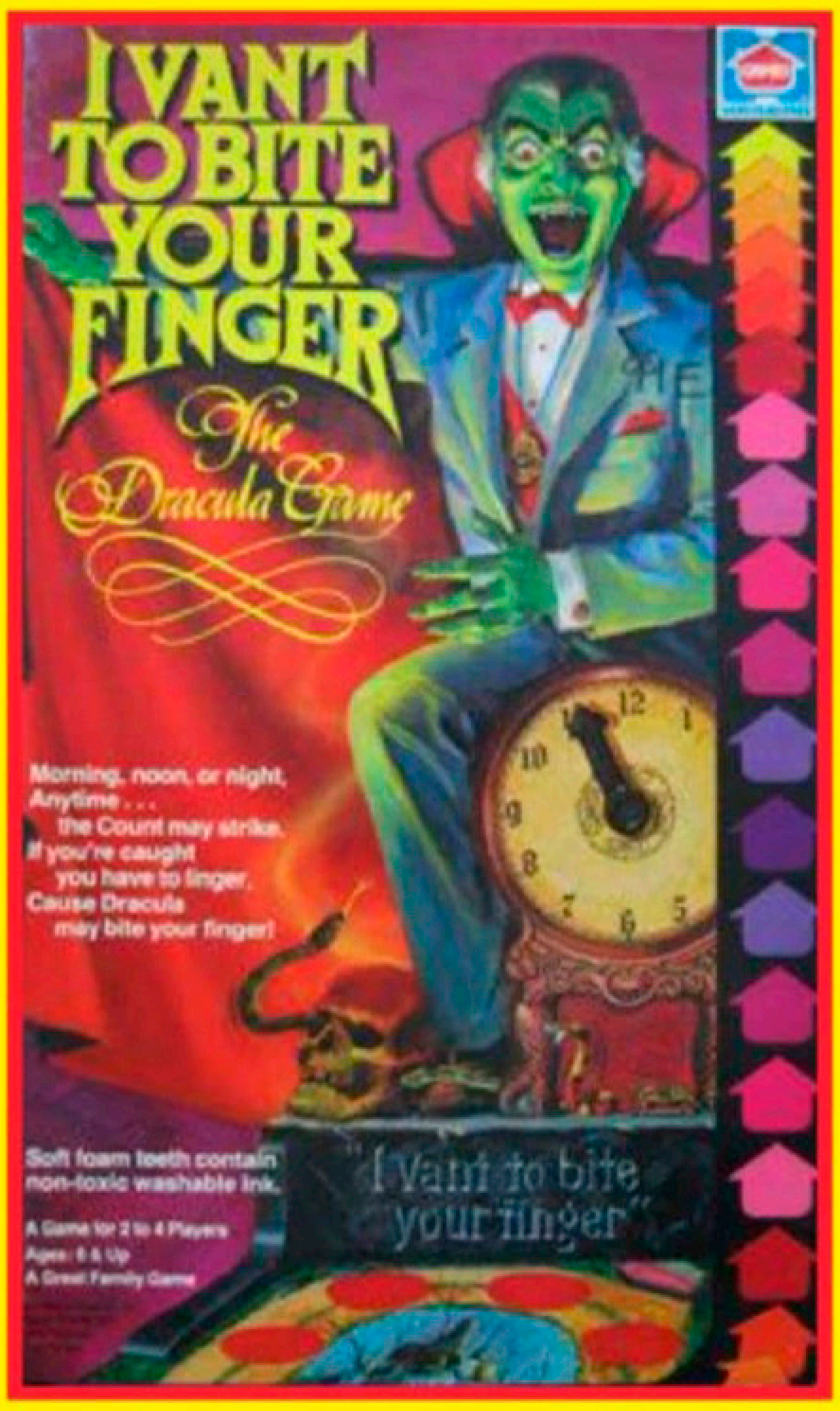
The narratives for a lot of table top games tend to be pretty simple affairs. Typically, you're to become the best at whatever the game's about or you're facing off against some sort of horror. Quite often there is a big bad end guy that needs to be defeated. A lot of game stories work with the assumption that there's a 'dragon at the end'. The dragon in *Dungeons & Dragons* isn't a regular monster; it's signifying that the story being told is either ending or changing in some way.

Old-school '80s kids' games had 'beat the baddy' as its premise all the time. For example, roll and move game *I Vant to Bite Your Finger* was all about escaping Dracula. It was a simple game - roll dice, and move along the board. But stand on the wrong square and you had to stick your finger in the mouth of the large Dracula model. If you were unlucky, he'd 'bite' you, leaving a bloody mark on you. (It was two red felt tips rather than fangs.) The level of threat added something special to the game, and a real sense of achievement.

We get similar thing with the endlessly reprinted game *Fury of Dracula*. One of you plays Dracula, the others are Van Helsing and chums looking to hunt you down; the existence of the protagonist tells the story and it's an absolutely thrill to finally face him down for that (hopefully) final confrontation. Vampires make great endgame villains; they were once human, tend to be ancient and have lots of resources. This means that in addition to being an actual monster with claws, fangs, and supernatural powers, they also have motivation and a backstory. This is what makes Dracula so compelling in *Fury*, you can see his point of view.

It's also the reason why the *D&D* campaign *Ravenloft* has become a perennial favourite. The original version came out in 1983 and was a Gothic haunted house adventure. The dungeon was replaced by a spooky village and Castle Ravenloft. The dragon was Count Strahd, an ancient vampire. Utterly evil but with a sympathetic backstory - one of unrequited love and fratricide. The adventure is a bit of scavenger hunt, running around looking for clues and artefacts that will defeat Strahd and save the village, whilst avoiding the game-ending monsters that lurk pretty much everywhere. It's proper Gothic horror and is considered a classic by *D&D* standards.

So much so that it's stayed with the game throughout its numerous editions and variations. 1990's *Ravenloft* is a complete campaign setting; set in a place called 'the demi-plane of dread', it's a toolkit that allows you to run every Gothic horror trope in the book. One interesting feature is the Mists. They move and transport you, massaging your memory and dumping you in one hellish place


I VANT TO BITE YOUR FINGER
The Dracula Game
Morning, noon, or night,
Anytime . . .
the Count may strike.
If you're caught
you have to finger,
Cause Dracula
may bite your finger!
Soft foam teeth contain non-toxic washable ink.
"I Vant to bite your finger"
A Game for 2 to 4 Players
Ages: 6 & Up
A Great Family Game

FURY OF DRACULA
WIZKIDS
A Game of Deduction and Gothic Horror for 2–5 Players

> **"Captain America throwing his shield at Galactus just isn't going to cut it."**

TAROKKA DECK
CURSE of STRAHD REVAMPED
TAROKKA DECK
CREATURES of HORROR
BAROVIA

or another. It's very Hammer Horror and pretty much defined fantasy horror in the '90s. If you've a fondness for anything starring Christopher Lee and Vincent Price, then you've got a good idea what this game is about. Much like Hammer, though, some of its elements are of its time, so be prepared to adapt the game for your party's needs.

The new edition of *D&D* revisited Ravenloft with *Curse of Strahd: Revamped.* Fifth Edition books tend to be full-on adventures that last for months of play and have lots of information in them, and this book does exactly that. Strahd is a magnificent monster and constantly harassing the players. It plays a bit more *Castlevania* than it does Hammer, but that's no bad thing. The *Revamped* version has been written to be more accessible to everyone, removing stereotypes and creating a more rounded and interesting world. It also has some amazing end scenarios, truly memorable sort of stuff.

Of course, if you just want to get to the end and have a huge fight, there are other games that do that for you. We've mentioned *Heroclix* many times in these pages, but that's pretty much because it's the best superhero miniatures game out there. It's a combat game where the rules are mostly stored in a dial on the base of the model. As your hero takes damage the dial clicks over, revealing different rules. The games are meant to be balanced. Except, of course, for when it comes to Galactus. In case you're not a Marvel fan, Galactus is a planet-devouring monster from beyond time itself. It roams the stars, looking for whole worlds to consume. It commonly appears as an enormous humanoid figure wearing a massive winged hat, and he's clad in purple armour. He looks both ridiculous and terrifying in equal measure. And to be honest, Captain America throwing his shield at Galactus just isn't going to cut it. *Heroclix* sells *Galactus the Devourer* as a premium model, it's over a foot tall and posed firing a massive beam of energy from his hands. It looks amazing on the shelf and there's a head swap option in case you can't cope with the helmet. It's highly detailed and quite eye-catching. The model itself has a full (if concise) rules set and multiple dials built into the base. The idea is that this model represents its own variant game of *Heroclix*. Bring your best heroes and best map. Set up Galactus and work together to try to defeat him. He's incredibly difficult to beat as he always has a trick up his sleeve and, of course, once you've knocked him down, he gets back up again. He can also make heralds; creating an agent to help him soften up the party at the start. Honestly, half the fun is putting on your best booming voice and quoting the comic books. This isn't the first time *Heroclix* has done Galactus as a model, but it's the best-looking one we've seen and it's readily available. The previous one was infamous for its scarcity. This one is bigger, scarier, and has a much more entertaining rules set. Galactus might be one of the goofiest cosmic horrors to come to comics, but goodness me, is the new model fun to play with!

Defeating guardians should always be a big deal in games; unlike movies and books, you actually have to make the effort with board games. One Guardian that, as yet, gamers have not yet defeated is *The Guardian of the Dark Room*. John Robertson's award-winning interactive adventure game has moved to Twitch now that the theatres have been closed, and he's been running many sessions of his famous game online. You'd think someone would have cracked it, but still the frenetic protector of the Dark Room's secrets seems undefeated.

Ed Fortune is currently GM-ing an Actual Play Podcast Star Wars podcast Force Majeure - download it today. He's also running a 5E D&D campaign and his party have somehow found themselves in Sigil. It won't end well, but shhh, don't tell them. You can contact him via Twitter on @ed_fortune or via ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com

MARVEL
GALACTUS
THE DEVOURER
PREMIUM COLOSSAL FIGURE

John Robertson

G-LOC AND LOAD

by Ed Fortune

STARBURST goes on location to get the lowdown on sci-fi feature G-LOC. We caught up with director TOM PATON and the cast, including CASPER VAN DIEN, to find out what to expect…

We ventured into the wilds of deepest darkest Yorkshire to take a look at the set of G-LOC, the latest genre movie from one of STARBURST's favourite directors, Tom Paton. This time around, it's an actual studio, rather than an adapted forest or improvised battlefield. This is because *G-LOC* is a movie about space and spacecraft; a piece of classic science fiction, using the fantastic and forward-looking to tell stories about the modern-day. Set in a distant future, *G-LOC* is the story of Bran (*True Blood*'s Stephen Moyer), a man who is fleeing the dying Earth to make a new home of the distant human colony of Rhea. Alas, they are not open to the sudden rush of refugees coming to their world.

The set designer's office is plastered with photographs taken from real-world space stations. Though *G-LOC* is set quite far in the future, the aesthetic is meant to be one that's lived in. The Rheans prefer more mechanical and cruder approaches to technology, so the entire ethos behind the set design is to make the whole thing lived. The office is littered with tiny models of the set and countless rejected ideas. The set designers have spent hours poring over old archive footage of the Space Race, and are clearly inspired by the MIR and SkyLab, but more towards the end of those stations lifespan.

The set is busy; one small area is a full spaceship console, complete with switches, pilots chair and the like. It looks amazing once the lights are turned on. Another set is a generic control room, one that has been redressed more than once throughout filming. Finally, we make it to a classic sci-fi corridor. Actors Casper Van Dien and Tala Gouveia are gearing up for a day of action-heavy filming in the claustrophobic corridor that makes up much of the movie's set.

We talked with director Tom Paton to learn more about where the idea for the movie came from: "*I was looking at the whole Venezuelan crisis, and I watched the documentary about this family that was travelling from Venezuela and how they were full of all these better life dreams that were going to be there waiting for them. And when they get to the American border, they weren't allowed in. So they spend three years in this detention camp in horrible conditions. All these people with their hopes and dreams ripped away from them. And then you look at the world today with Trump and Brexit, and I wanted to tell a story that reflected our times. I wanted to take a fantasy film and make it relevant to now.*"

"*So G-Loc is about that.*" Paton continues, "*In this movie, Earth is heading toward a second Ice Age, and suddenly this gate pops up in space and on the other side is a habitable world called Rhea. But one year on Earth is 18 years on Rhea. People from Earth are migrating through, but by the time Stephen Moyer's character tries to get to Rhea, settlers have been there for hundreds of years. And they don't want any more refugees.*"

Tom describes Moyer as a "*phenomenally powerful actor.*" He continues "*You know, you write these things, and they sound good on the page. But when you hear them coming out of somebody of his calibre, he elevates the material and is really, really impressive.*"

It's a fantastic cast; Casper Van Dien is perhaps best known for his role as Johnny Rico in *Starship Troopers.*

In *G-Loc*, he plays Decker, part of the crew of the ship bringing supplies to the Earth refugee camp. We caught up with him in his trailer, still as energetic and sparkly-eyed as he was back in the Johnny Rico days. We asked him what kept bringing him back to sci-fi. "*I've done a lot of work, including many westerns, and I've made enough movies for a lifetime, but I keep coming back to sci-fi - I just love sci-fi films. I think early on people associated me with Johnny Rico, and that's okay, I like working in the industry. I just recently had a small part in Alita: Battle Angel, and it was a lot of fun to do that. And that was because of Starship Troopers.*"

Casper continues, "*I read Starship Troopers as a kid. I went to military school and grew up in a military family, so it was one of the books everyone around me liked to read. And I watched a lot of propaganda films and war films. And I just enjoyed them. Starship Troopers is an amazing book, but the script was completely different. When I read the script, I was like, 'wow, I thought I'd missed something from the book', but it was all the genius of Ed Neumeier and Verhoeven. But it's not just their satire alone, Robert A. Heinlein's sense of humour is still there. I think a lot of Americans missed the satire when it first came out.*" The actor smiles, "*One of the things that I like about that movie is that people on the far right in America and people on the far left love it. And they love it because they think it's their film. And, you know, it's quite interesting to have both sides like it, but I like that they can have a discussion and say why it's theirs. And I think that it's better to have films that bring people to the table being able to have a conversation.*" The parallel to his latest film is clear "*That was one of the things that appealed with G-LOC. I liked working with Tom, he's great. I would love to work with him again. He's a film buff and he's passionate, young, and exciting. It's awesome to be on set with him. And I think he's got a huge career ahead of him.*"

Mike Beckingham is no stranger to readers of STARBURST, with credits including Tom Paton movies such as *Black Site* and *Redwood*. *G-LOC* sees Mike take on a different sort of role. "*I play the role of Edison, Bran's computer. It was fun to do but challenging because I'm only a voice.*" Edison is also the movie's comic relief of sorts; a rather self-centred AI that provides sarcastic commentary throughout the film. As usual, Mike is modest about his talents; despite a lack of a physical presence, the charisma of the character shines through.

The other main character is Osha, a native of Rhea. She's played by Tala Gouveia, best known for her work on kids sci-fi shows such as *Thunderbirds Are Go* and *Scream Street*. We asked what she thought of the character. "*She has to fight quite a lot of big guys. She's very scrappy. She's sarcastic - funny hopefully!*" The movie puts Tala through her paces, "*there's a lot of big, exciting action, and it's my first time doing my own stunts, so that was a fun challenge, which I'm really enjoying.*"

Of course, Tom Paton is better known for creating horror and action movies. We asked him why he felt this story needed to be sci-fi. "*Telling current stories is the point of science fiction, at least it is to me. It takes the world as we know it and repackages it into something different. For those of us that are politically engaged anyway, we understand what they're doing. But there's this great trick in basic sci-fi. Things like Battlestar Galactica take somebody on a Friday night who wants to enjoy themselves. And the next day, they'll feel like they've changed their opinion on something, but can't quite understand why they did it. And it was because sci-fi makes it the right size, gets them to ingest it in a way that they find palatable, rather than feeling like you're being told off or lectured. And I think that's kind of what this script was about - you're having a good time while watching it, but hopefully you'll come away from it and think about the message as well.*"

G-LOC hits DVD and digital platforms on October 12th.

Picture credits: Ross Day

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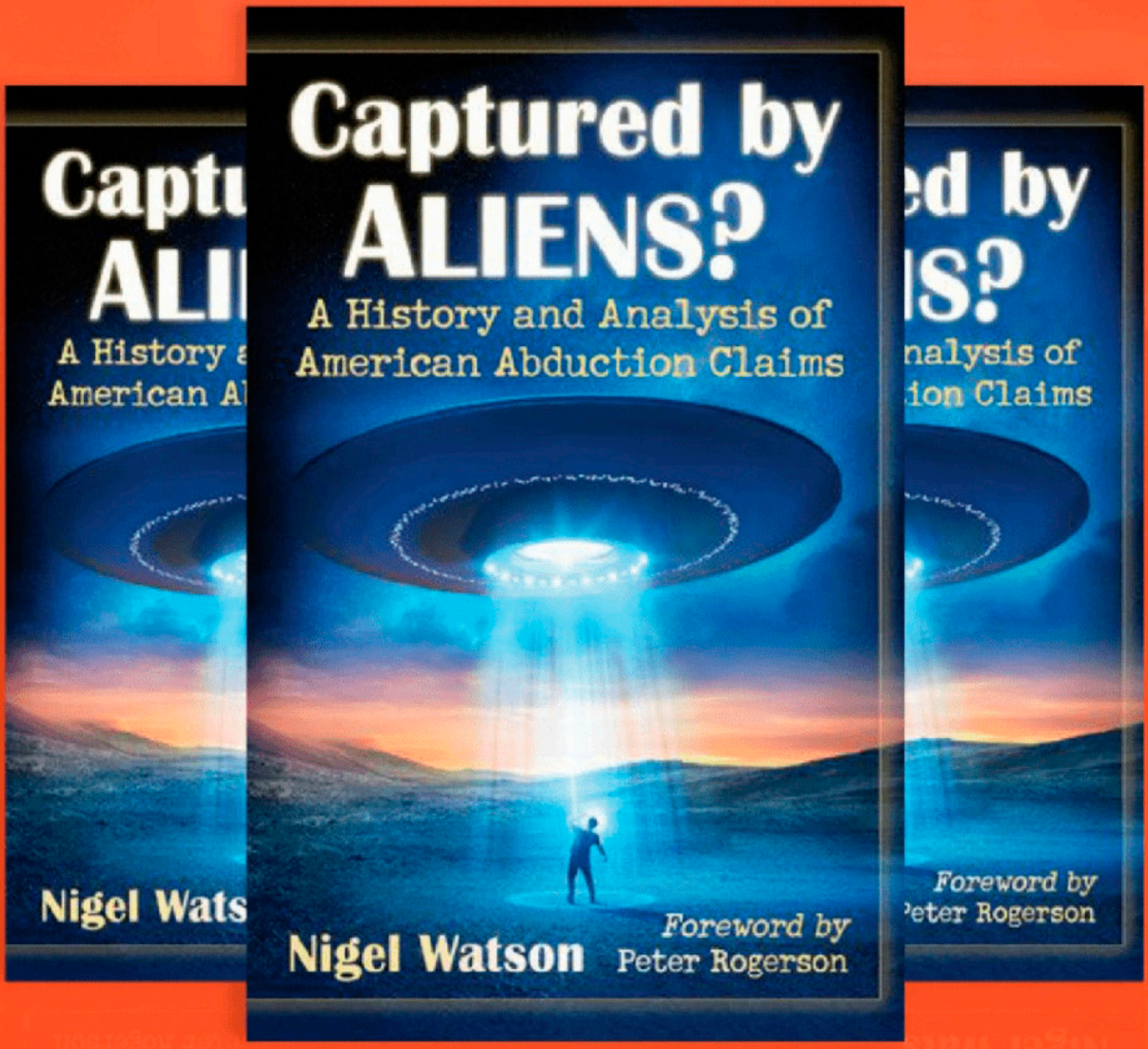
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WELCOME TO
MELLOW COAST
A small community fishing village
"Catch'em kill'em keep em"

INDEPENDENTS DAY

ALEX CHURCHYARD & MICHAEL HOLIDAY

Words: Kris Heys

A love-letter to the dodgy old-school slasher flicks that you'd find in the darkest corners of your local video store, I SCREAM ON THE BEACH! has been delighting audiences since its arrival on the festival scene earlier this year. In this super-sized edition of INDEPENDENTS DAY, we speak to the madmen behind the movie about the road to making their debut feature; gateway horror; advice to aspiring filmmakers; and much more...

STARBURST: You bump into super-producer Jason Blum in a lift, you've got a captive audience until he gets out at floor 13, how do you pitch him *I Scream on the Beach*?

Alex Churchyard: Okay, so it's an '80s horror film set in a UK coastal town, and it's made to look as if you're watching a VHS tape, deliberately playing into being a low-budget slasher.

Michael Holiday: The story follows a young girl called Emily who saw her father murdered when she was a child, but his body was never found, and no one believes her...

Alex Churchyard: ...Ten or so years later that's still the case, but as she investigates what happened to her dad, people start dying again...

Michael Holiday: ...At the hands of a gasmask-wearing killer who's on the loose! Think seagulls, conspiracies, a banging synth soundtrack, lots of decapitations, and Lloyd Kaufman's floating head. Who are we kidding, Jason Blum is calling security if we ever try to pitch this.

How did the idea for *ISOTB* come about?

AC: Essentially, when I was about twelve, my brother and I would make these short films on our Tyco VideoCam based around this central idea of an unseen killer that turns out to be something quite unexpected. I met Mike when I was about 17, and I roped him into making a few more of these shorts. Years later, I wrote a feature-length version; it was more of a '90s-style slasher set in the present day that revolved around college students. Mike and I then decided to turn that idea into *I Scream*...

MH: The script ended up being almost unrecognisable from how *I Scream* turned out. But without giving too much away, that initial draft gave us a clear idea of how we wanted the film to end, so we worked backwards from there. We knew we'd be working with a tiny budget for this, so we decided to think about what assets we had available. In terms of location, we both happen to live in a seaside town, which for whatever reason is a location we'd never properly utilised before. We're also both huge lovers of '70s and '80s horror, which obviously ended up being the direction we went with in terms of period and style for the film. We had this basic concept of an American-style slasher film set in such a quintessentially British location, and it kind of snowballed from there.

You mentioned that it was a tiny budget you were working with - could we ask how small exactly?

MH: Whatever you think it is, it's probably lower. Honestly, I'm not sure I could even tell you. We started the initial shooting of this film back in 2016, then life got in the way and we didn't start again until 2019.

AC: We never set an exact budget, but we filmed in blocks for several weekends over a three-month period - so half the time it was just figuring out how much money we had that weekend to feed people and pay for travel, etc. Charity shops were our friends for costumes; we figured out most of the FX ourselves - and if not, then one of our makeup artists did - and we just kept everything very small behind the scenes.

MH: A fair bit of the equipment was either stuff we'd put together over the years or went on my credit card. Luckily, both being editors by trade we've made quite a few friends who are filmmakers who happily lent us a few bits and pieces - shout out to our camera operator David O'Rourke for a lot of that!

AC: Yeah, we just used what we had at the time money-wise, so the budget basically came from Mike and I's earnings. Hill Burton did come on as an Executive Producer towards the end of the shoot and some of that money was vital in helping us finish.

Not only was the film co-written by yourselves, but you co-directed it too. Bearing in mind that this is still somehow considered unorthodox - unless the directors happen to be brothers, in which case it's totally normal for some reason - how did you arrive at the decision to tackle *ISOTB* this way?

MH: I don't ever remember this being a big discussion, we just kind of immediately fell into it. When it came to the writing, Alex had written that very early draft by himself, and then we just started meeting up together to hash out ideas from then onwards. We were both working together full-time as Editors, and when we'd finish up for the day we'd often head to the local pub and start writing with Alex typing on a keyboard and me shouting stupid ideas while having a beer.

AC: I think there's a sense that we'd done quite a lot of stuff together, so it didn't feel too strange to direct our first feature together. We felt that it needed to be both of our visions.

MH: When it came to actually directing, we tried to split the role into different areas. The idea was that Alex would deal directly with actors and I would handle the technical side of filming. This didn't mean we were solely responsible for those areas, but it just helped make things clear on set. If Alex wanted to do something different in terms of how a shot looked, he would talk to me and I'd control the crew for that side of things. If I had notes for an actor, I'd talk to Alex about that and he'd talk to them. It sounds a little convoluted, but it meant each person on set knew who to talk to, so there was no confusion on that side of things.

AC: There were definitely times making it where if I'd been alone, I really don't know what I'd have done.

As you were telling Jason Blum earlier, the film has a delightful aesthetic that pays loving homage to low budget filmmaking, warts and all - was this as creatively freeing as it looks?

MH: Yes and no. Creating the aesthetic was by far my favourite part of the film. I think the fun creative side of it was actually how specific it was. We weren't trying to create *Halloween* or *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, we were trying to create the weird bargain bin VHS tape you might have found back then that no one had ever heard of. So I think that gave us a lot of freedom to make the whole thing look a bit chaotic and messy; to be creative and just have fun with it. Adding in surreal dream sequences, floating ghostly heads, murders that on a physical level probably don't make any sense. However, the flip side of that was that because we set it in the '80s, it was important to us that everything felt authentic to that period. But trying to do that on an extremely limited budget is very challenging!

AC: Yeah, the VHS look allowed us to let our mistakes appear like deliberate decisions, which was handy! And for me, I liked the idea that we just couldn't have enough crash zooms on characters looking shady. With effects, you can be less precious if they don't come off quite how you wanted as well. However, sometimes you'd get shots that looked really nice in the raw footage, and to some degree you'd feel sad about having to make them look like grainy VHS.

> *"Did you know blood bags can turn into a weird jelly when they get too cold? Because we didn't until we were trying to slit someone's throat on a windy beach!"* – Michael Holiday

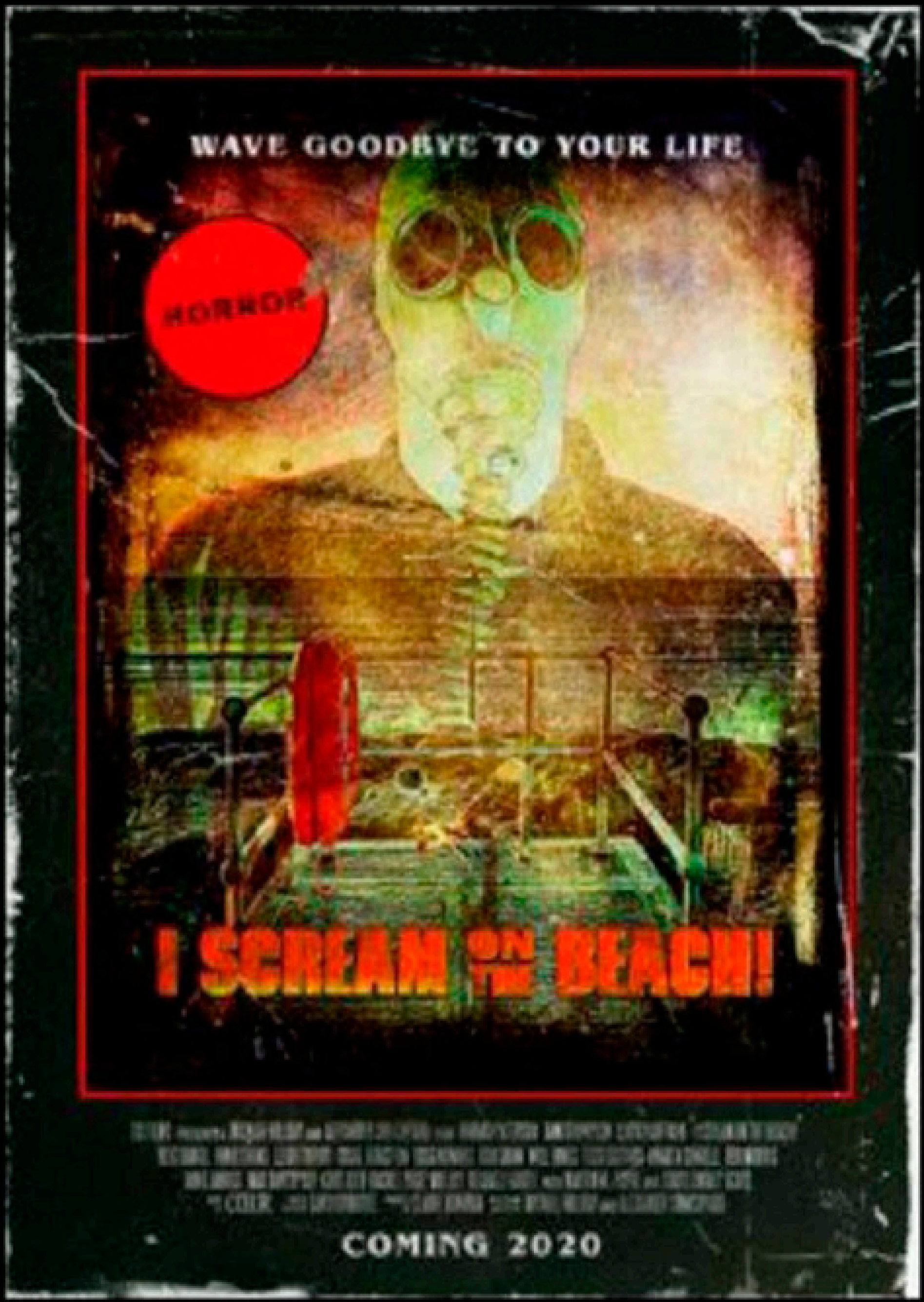
In replicating these imperfections were there any aspects that proved surprisingly tricky to pull off?

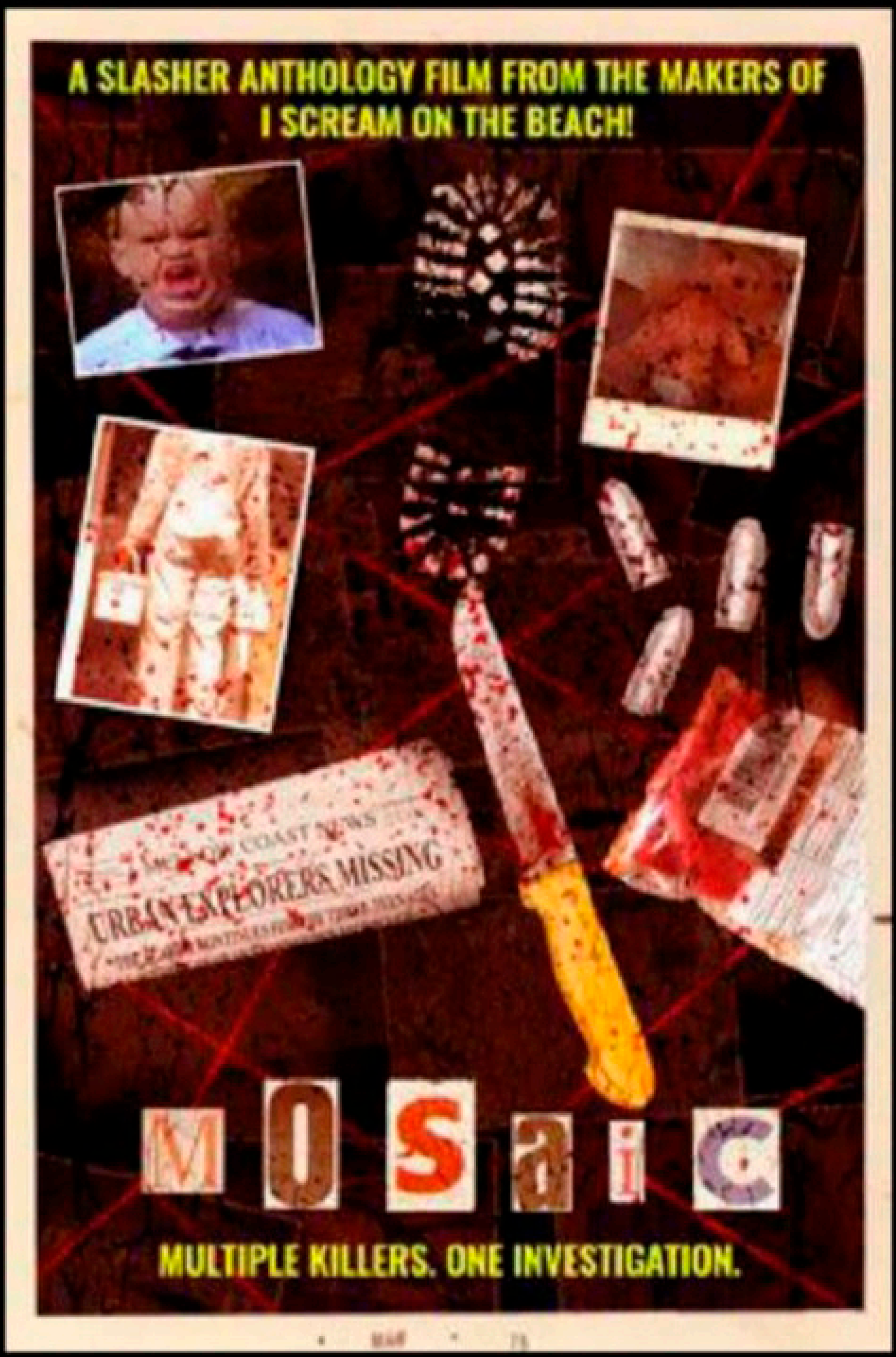
MH: Initially, to get that feeling of authenticity, we were actually planning to run the entire film through an actual VHS player. We'd seen so many films do the 'old film' look where everything still felt so digital and we didn't want *I Scream* to suffer from that. However, the technical process behind this ended up getting increasingly complicated and we ended up having to abandon it. We did end up using VHS scans to create the effect in post though, so - we hope - it still feels like the real deal.

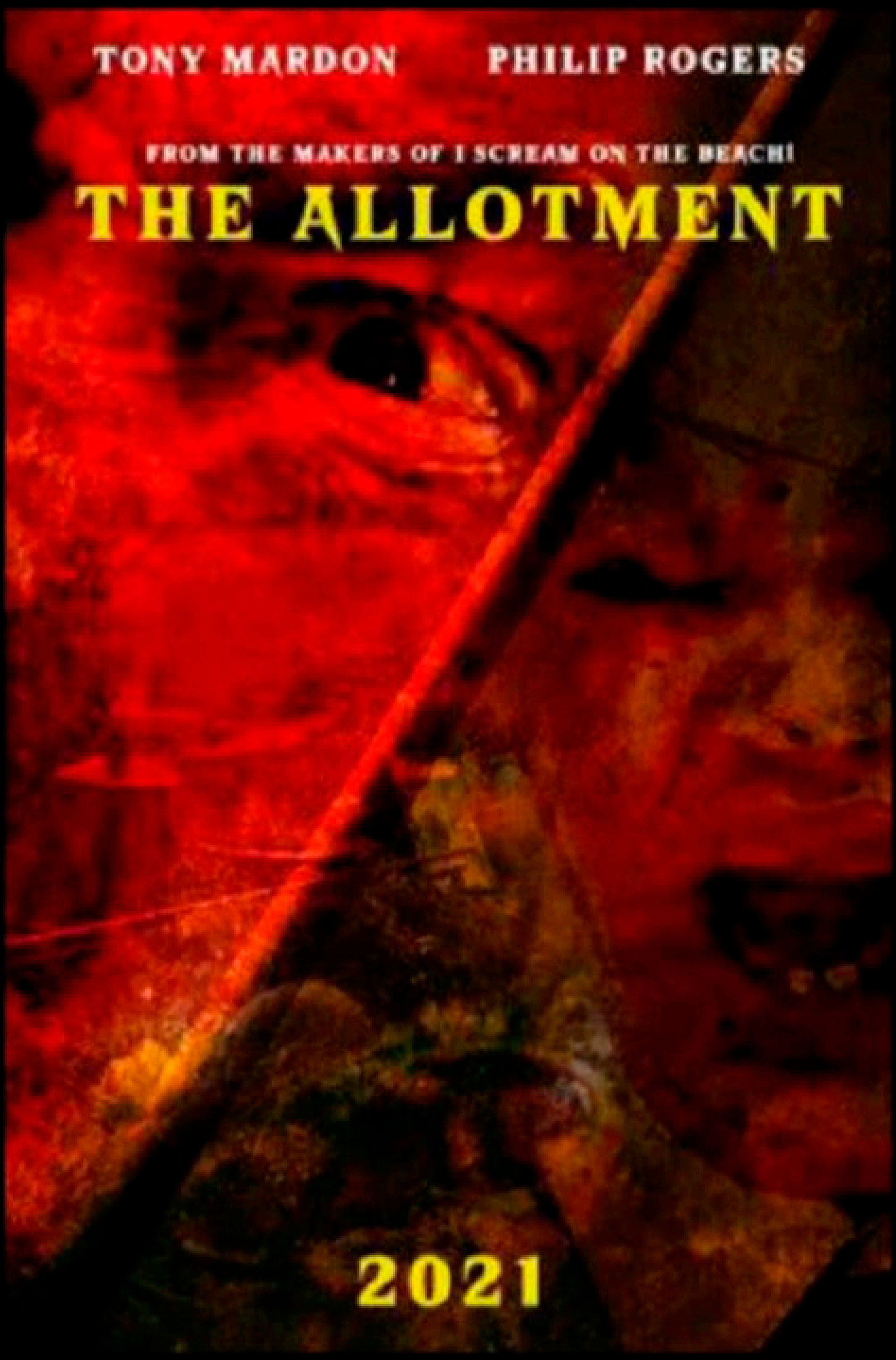
AC: I think it's also tricky with the actors to some degree, as some performances need to come off a certain way that might not be instinctively the way an actor would *want* to go. I think our first instinct was that everyone in the film should be very wooden, but ultimately, I think we have an interesting medley of characters and actors, which might be truer to the films we're referencing in a way.

MH: We tried to make all of the effects as practical as possible too, which, while great fun, produced its own challenges. Especially when trying to

I SCREAM ON THE BEACH!


WAVE GOODBYE TO YOUR LIFE
HORROR
I SCREAM ON THE BEACH!
COMING 2020


A SLASHER ANTHOLOGY FILM FROM THE MAKERS OF I SCREAM ON THE BEACH!
COAST NEWS
URBAN EXPLORERS MISSING
MOSAIC
MULTIPLE KILLERS. ONE INVESTIGATION.



film on an English beach in winter. Did you know blood bags can turn into a weird jelly when they get too cold? Because we didn't until we were trying to slit someone's throat on a windy beach.

This is your first feature, but what kind of film projects came before it?

MH: During our time in university, we made quite a few shorts. Alex had a bit of attention from a documentary he made towards the end of uni, but after that we both kind of stepped away from it for a long time. As we mentioned before, we both started working as editors for a company but that was focused on educational content, so wasn't really the same thing. *I Scream* ended up being this dream project we had on the back burner; the thing we had on a laptop somewhere that we kept saying one day we'd actually make. I think for the longest time it just kind of felt like something to daydream about but wasn't ever going to happen. We'd go to film festivals together occasionally, and one in particular was in our hometown, called Horror-on-Sea. Each year, we'd go and say next year we'll enter something of our own into it. As the 2019 festival approached, I was fed up of not doing anything creatively to contribute to it. So, I made a short film called *The Ratman of Southend*. It was just a little local ghost story and I made a simple short that I could shoot in a day and edit during my lunch breaks. I didn't expect it to get into the festival; I just did it as an outlet to be honest. That was the first time in nearly 10 years I'd made something that was shown to any kind of audience and I think that was one of the things that made us both say 'right, screw it - let's stop being wimps about this and just give it a go'. I think a month after the premiere of *Ratman* we were sat on set for *I Scream.*

> *"I made a simple short film that I could shoot in a day and edit during my lunch breaks."* – Alex Churchyard

Have you both always wanted to be involved in the industry?

AC: I've wanted to be involved in film since I was very young, maybe 10 or 11. I used to do faux radio shows with my cousin that we'd record on his Talkboy - as seen in *Home Alone 2* - which I think was one of my earliest avenues for creating stories.

MH: I distinctly remember being about 10-years-old in school, me and my two best friends would always talk about horror films - even though I was never allowed to see any! *Scream* had just come out and we decided we were going to make our own '*Scream film*'; we had no camera so it was just three children running around a playground pretending to stab each other while I shouted out things I thought a director would say. Then in high school, in our final year, as a project, our drama teacher let me and a group of friends make a film. They didn't give us any real restraints beyond it being about the school, so we made a mockumentary about a film crew coming to the school who don't realise that all the teachers are actually killing off the pupils. I'm surprised we got away with that, but apparently they still show it to students occasionally, so that's nice.

We've touched on the *Scream* series being an early influence on you, Michael - how about you, Alex?

AC: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I was obsessed by it and wished I could write on it. Similarly, *Scream* also. I think with both, I reacted to how self-aware they were and I loved that. *Scream* was my gateway into discovering a lot of the horror films it referenced and ignited my own love of the genre.

MH: My mum was super strict about letting me watch horror films when I was younger, but she did let me have a TV in my room, and I mostly just stayed up watching comedy shows on Channel 4. But, quite often, they'd run programmes about films some nights. Then around the late '90s, early 2000s, there was this sudden surge of previously banned or censored films being re-released. I distinctly remember stumbling across a programme on film censorship, that I think maybe Mark Kermode presented, so I was suddenly flooded with all these images from the likes of *The Exorcist*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Funny Games*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Which was all pretty traumatising! But the one that really stuck with me was seeing Leatherface appearing from behind that metal door, hammer in hand, in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. I don't think I slept for a while. That film just felt like something I'd never experienced before. It felt so real. It felt dangerous. Like people shouldn't be allowed to even watch it! It took me years to finally pluck up the courage to see the film - I even had to watch the remake first because it felt 'safer'! But I think that film cemented filmmaking for me as a passion. To this day, it's still one of my favourite films and shows off how powerful and impactful cinema can be, regardless of its budget or who stars in it.

***Independents Day* is very popular with readers who aspire to get their own projects off the ground and on to our screens, so, as established award-winning filmmakers yourselves, we'd like to get your quick thoughts on an age-old question: should they go to film school?**

MH: I think this is a tricky question to answer. Neither of us went to film school specifically, but we did study film production at both college and university. In terms of me getting a job, I think having that degree helped me get a foot in the door as an in-house video editor. But I really didn't enjoy my experience at university. I was possibly a little too immature at the time to make the most of it. Either way, I felt I learned more in six months of filming and editing professionally after uni than I had done in my four years of education. This is going back about ten years now, so things have obviously changed a lot. There are just so many free resources online! The amount of times I've used YouTube to learn how to do something in both my day job and while making *I Scream* is ridiculous.

AC: Uni was fun at times, we made some stuff that was alright, but I think we could have made *ISOTB* without degrees. And people are now growing up with Adobe Creative Suite on their PCs and phones that are more capable than the entry-level cameras I had access to at their age.

MH: You don't have to put yourself in debt anymore to learn how to make films. I know it's such a cliché to say now, but it's a fact that you can make a film on your phone, which is just mind-blowing to me. So personally, I'd just say get out there and start making films, make anything! You don't even have to show anyone if you don't want, just start making things and you'll learn the basics pretty damn fast. If, after a couple of years of doing that, you feel like you're still missing out on something, then sure, maybe look into film school. But to begin with, I'd personally weigh up if it's worth the cost anymore.

Great advice. So, once they've made their first project and are looking for an audience, film festivals can be very costly to enter, especially at such an early career stage when, let's face it, everybody's skint. Conversely, the straight-to-YouTube route is free, but prohibits filmmakers from entering the majority of events. Drawing on your own experiences, where do you stand on the festival vs online debate?

AC: I love festivals; coming together with like-minded people, viewing other people's awesome projects and seeing an audience react to yours. I think online content is great too, but I'd prefer to try to get into festivals - you can't beat seeing your film on a big screen with an audience. It can be costly though, as you say, so speak to other filmmakers, do some research - I like to look at their social channels and see how much promotion they do, and how much interaction with the filmmakers they have as well.

MH: Personally, for us, I think online was never an option we seriously considered. We made *I Scream on the Beach* specifically for a horror film festival audience. I wasn't sure how well it would translate to an audience outside of genre fans when we first put it out there. Plus, it's so damn stupid that I think it's best enjoyed with an audience, ideally one that's had a few drinks! Putting a film out online isn't just a case of uploading it and that's it. It can become a full-time job trying to get the word out there, pushing people towards the film. Especially if you don't have an advertising budget to work with. But on the flipside, the potential audience is basically limitless. So, I think it depends on your project, but it didn't feel right for us for this. But that doesn't mean we wouldn't go that route in the future.

> *"Get out there and start making films. Make anything!"*
> – Michael Holiday

What can you tell us about your next projects?

MH: COVID-19 has been a massive spanner in the works in terms of getting the ball rolling too much on projects at the moment, but we do have a bunch of things in the works...

AC: The imminent future for our company - TIS Films - is shorts. Up first are *Miaow* with actor/filmmaker Martin W. Payne, which we hope to shoot later this year, and we've recently shot a horror short called *The Allotment*, which is currently in post-production. With regards to features, we've got a horror anthology titled *Mosaic*, and we have plans to spin-off *The Decorator* - which is the film-within-a-film in *ISOTB* - and an idea for a sequel to *ISOTB* itself, *I Scream Parlour*.

Great title!

MH: I'm also on a second draft of a feature called *The Wolf Will Hunt*, which is going to be drastically different to *ISOTB*.

We're back in the lift, Blum likes your pitch for *ISOTB* and agrees to check out the screener. That night, your phone rings and it's Jason. He loved it and you're on first name terms now. He offers you a gig remaking or rebooting a genre film or franchise of your choice, because in this timeline Blumhouse now owns *everything*. What project do you pick and why?

MH: *Hellraiser*. I would make a batshit insane *Hellraiser* film. The world is really lacking sexy hell films these days.

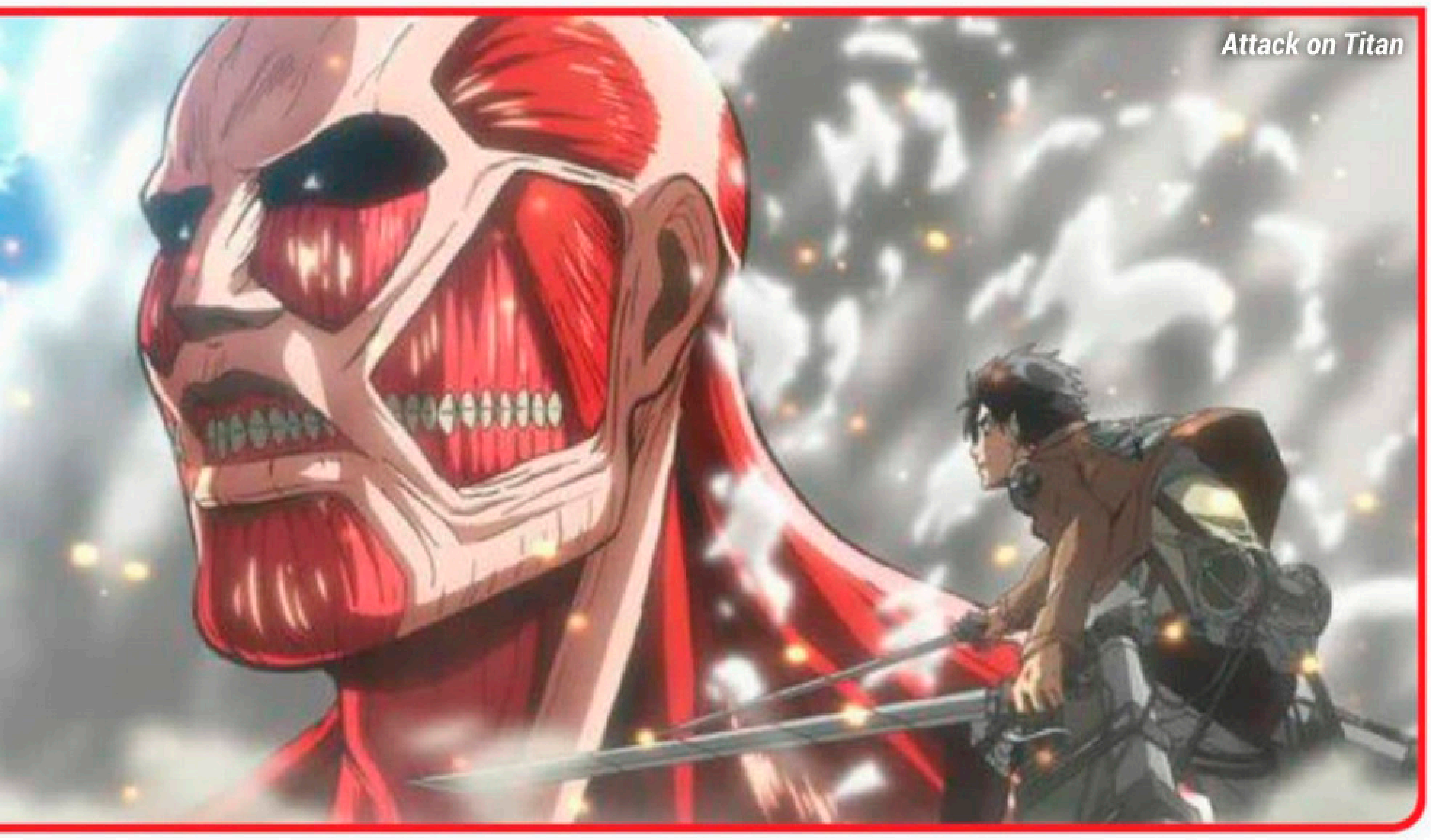
AC: Personally, I love *A Nightmare on Elm St*, and I feel like that has the most scope to do something visually different - nightmares can be literally *anything*, right! I still love the premise of *Freddy vs. Jason*, and the idea of some crazy team-up with Freddy, Jason, Pinhead, Chucky, etc, would be way too tempting in a world where one studio owns all that IP! Fuck it. All those characters vs the classic Universal Monsters!

To keep up to date on where you can see I SCREAM ON THE BEACH! and Alex & Michael's many other upcoming projects, follow them on social media @ISCREAMBEACH, or head to TISFILM.COM

YOUR GATEWAY INTO THE
WORLD OF ANIME...

ROAD TO OTAKU

...WITH YOUR NAVIGATOR,
JAMES 'MAGIC PERKINS' PERKINS



Anime is a wonderful thing – it's a form of animation unlike anything you've ever seen. So many iconic characters and worlds have been born in the wonderfully creative minds from our friends in the East. From Gundam Wing to Prince Arrietty, anime has something for everyone. Each issue, Road to Otaku will throw the spotlight on several essential anime works that every reader, no matter how new they are to the medium, should add to their watchlists immediately!

ATTACK ON TITAN

After huge, man-eating creatures known as Titans appeared suddenly 100 years ago, mankind has lived, or rather survived, behind giant walls until one day, that safety is ripped away from the humans in the blink of an eye. *Attack on Titan* is arguably the most popular anime of all-time (or at least in the last 20 years), and deservedly so.

Based on the manga by Hajime Isayama, this explosive and action-packed series began back in 2013 and has become a household name the world over. Known for its heart-racing action scenes, stunning animation and spine-tingling music, *Attack on Titan* has something for everyone. Since its manga debut in 2009, it has not only received an anime adaptation but has spawned countless spin-off manga, video games, live-action movies and, of course, merchandise.

The story follows Eren Jaeger who at an early age vows to destroy every titan after tragically losing loved ones. As he grows up, he trains to become a soldier to fight in the military in order to combat the Titan threat. However, after a failed mission, many secrets about Eren and the history of the Titans start to slowly be revealed. As with most shows, not just anime, if the story is so engaging that you are fully hooked as it approaches its fourth season, you know that it has rightly earned its popularity. Every episode leaves the future of the characters and world hanging in the balance and when it comes to shocks there are an abundance of them.

Wit Studio, the team behind the animation, cemented themselves as one of the best animation studios active today with their work on *Attack on Titan* and have gone on to animate entirely original works including *Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress*.

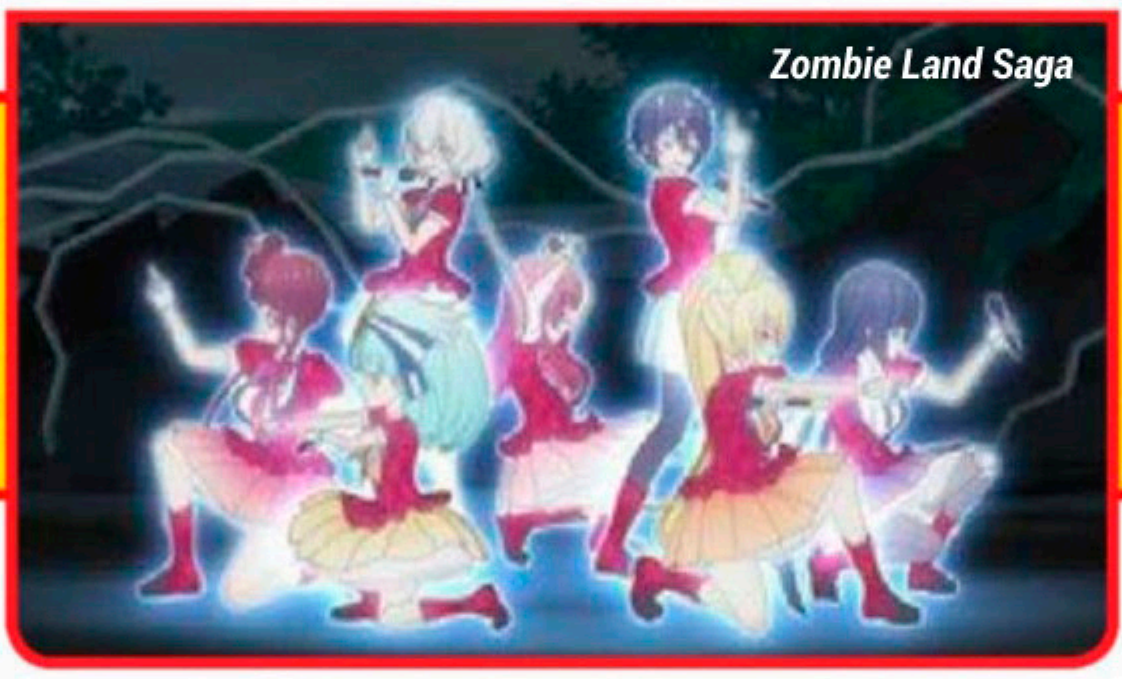
With plenty of mystery, badass characters, and shocks aplenty, *AoT* rightly rose to elite status within the anime community and, with its fourth and final season just around the corner, we're set for a mind-blowing climax to this phenomenal show.

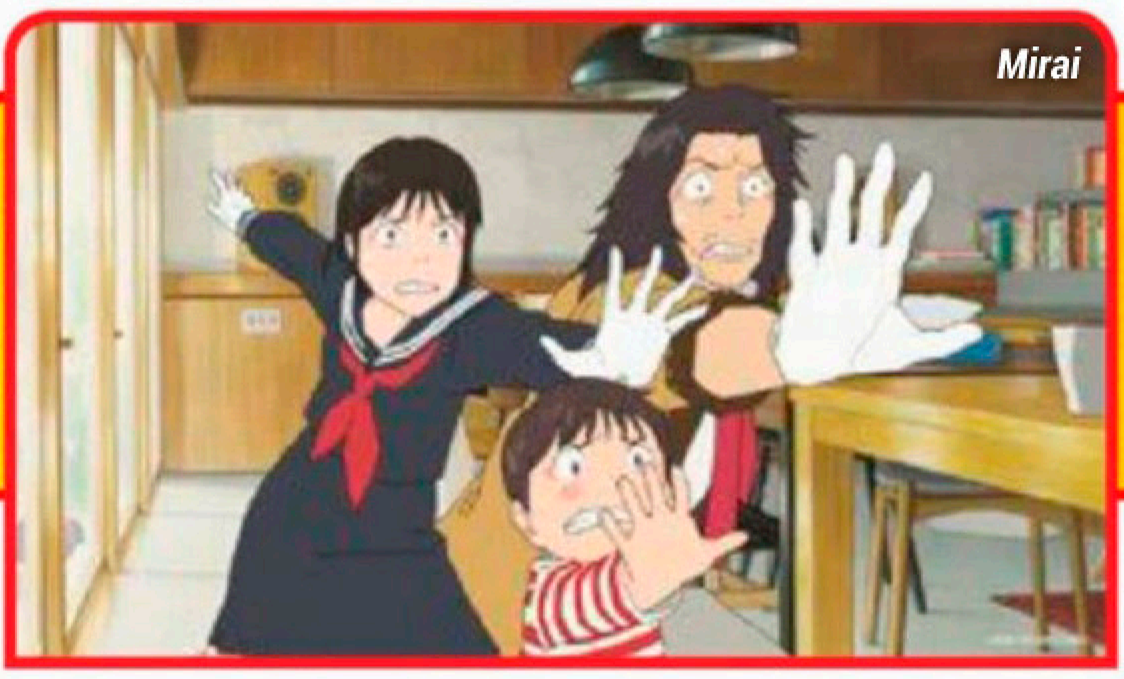
Where to Watch: Crunchyroll, FUNimation, Netflix

ZOMBIE LAND SAGA

A long-running subgenre of anime is the 'Idol' genre – where a story will follow a group of singers coming together,

Attack on Titan


Zombie Land Saga


Mirai

performing catchy and adorable songs while making friends and putting on the best show possible. Sounds fun, but nothing special, right? How about the addition of zombies? Now we're talking!

Zombie Land Saga, an entirely original anime produced by Studio MAPPA, takes the Idol genre to a whole new level and thus elaborating the appeal to a much wider audience. The story follows Idol group 'Franchouchou' who hold a secret from the world – they're actually all zombies! After Sakura's life is brutally cut short on her way to school, she awakens to find that she's been given a new lease of life by the mysterious and charismatic Kotaro Tatsumi who has brought these girls from across time back to life to save the prefecture of Saga from disappearing into obscurity. Cue a hilarious comedy about these girls becoming superstars while also having to hide their secret for fear of being hunted down.

This anime was one of the best of 2018 and since its release has had a second season announced, a manga adaptation launched, and multiple stage shows with the voice artists themselves performing all of the catchy songs featured in the series. The show is wonderfully animated with a host of colourful and interesting characters including the rebellious Saki, adorable Lily, and the hysterical Tae-chan (who is the best zombie, by far). As with any Idol anime, the songs are key to its success, and after the rap scene in one of the early episodes, you will see what we mean by the show boasting a fantastic soundtrack.

Whether you like musicals or not, *Zombie Land Saga* is well worth your time for the comedy and characters alone (but stay for the banging soundtrack too!).

Where to Watch: Crunchyroll, FUNimation, Blu-ray, DVD

MIRAI

For those of us with siblings, we can all relate to that deep feeling of jealousy – that moment when 'the other kid', be they older or more specifically younger, gets all the attention from parents, relatives, and family friends. Well, that's exactly what animation giant Mamoru Hosoda explores in his 2018 film *Mirai*.

The perfect world of four-year-old Kun is filled with recognition, praise, and all the toys he could want, but is turned upside down by the arrival of his baby sister, Mirai. After she 'steals' all the love for herself, Kun struggles to come to terms with this change and deals strongly with a feeling of jealousy towards her. However, through the magic of family, he begins to meet various relatives throughout history and starts to learn the true meaning of what it is to be a big brother and that 'family' means everything.

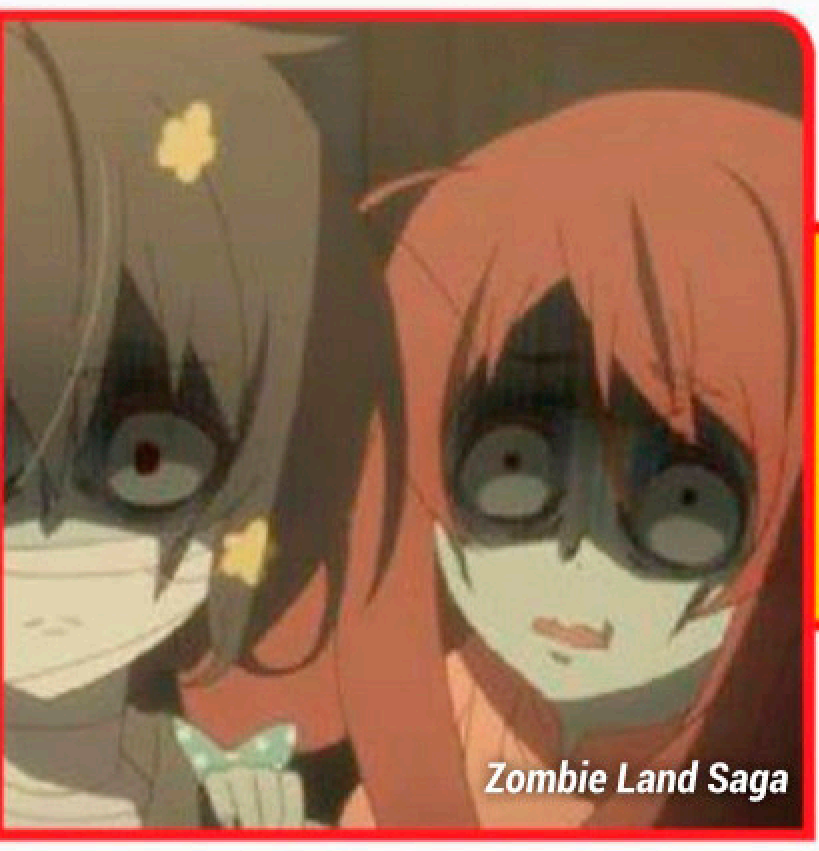
Hosada-san has always been a prevalent talent in the anime world and is best known for his other films including the outstanding *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* from 2006 and the mesmerising *Wolf Children* from 2012. With *Mirai*, Hosada-san cemented himself as one of the greats of the industry and was even rewarded with having the film nominated for Best Animated Feature at the 2019 Oscars alongside the likes of *Incredibles 2*, *Isle of Dogs*, *Ralph Breaks the Internet*, and the eventual winner, *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*.

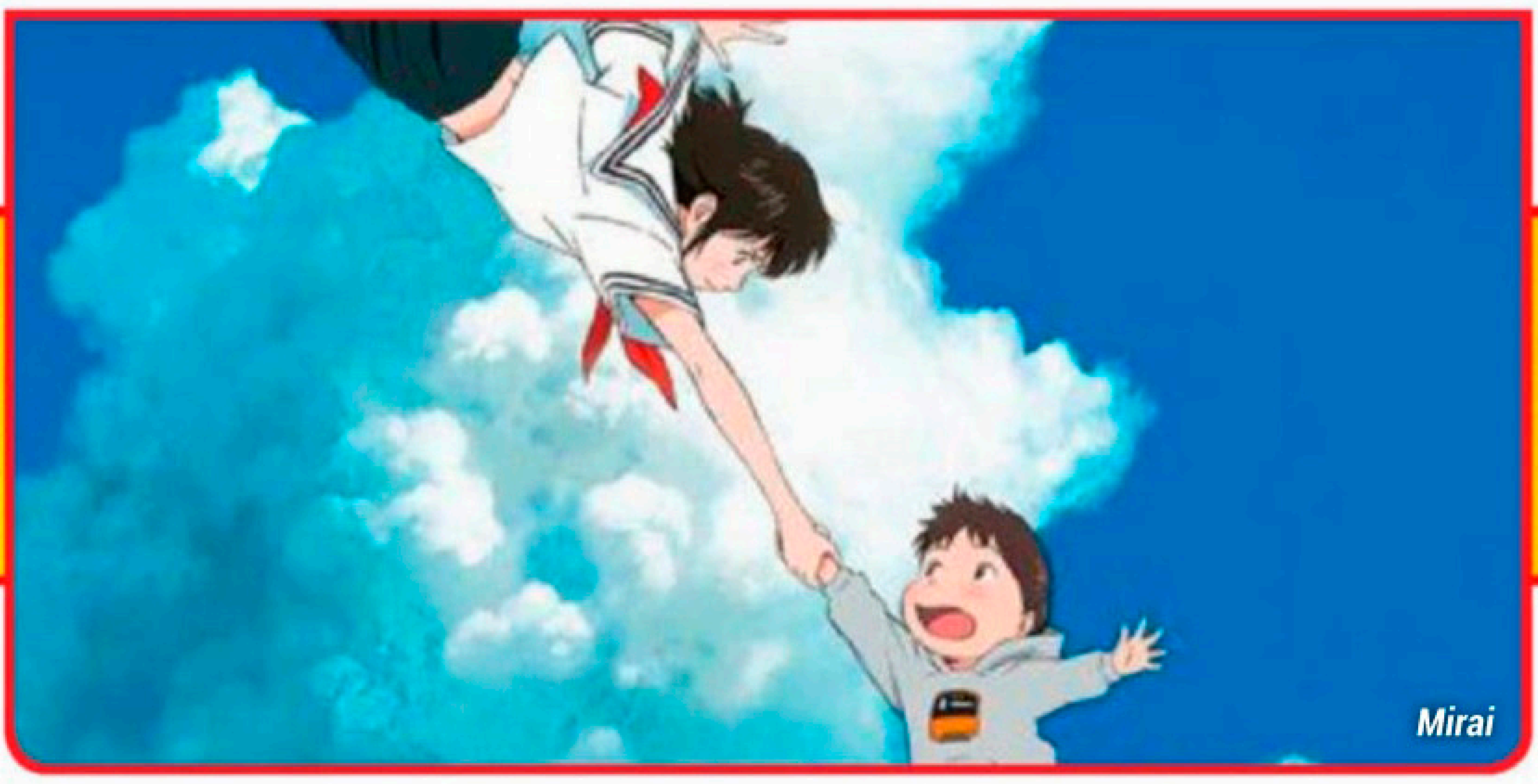
With the core narrative being very relatable to a large portion of the audience, or at least being rooted in reality with magical doses of sci-fi and time travel sprinkled in there, *Mirai* is such a powerful and gorgeous film to watch. Accompanied by a spellbinding score by Masakatsu Takagi, who has worked with Hosada-san before on other projects, the film comes together beautifully and will turn you into a weeping mess. This is a fantastic choice to be one of the first anime films that you watch as it truly shows the power of what this medium is capable of, with breath-taking visuals and relatable human characters at its core.

Where to Watch: Amazon, Blu-ray, DVD

What awaits us further down the road? How about a look at the struggle of making anime, or maybe a dream journey into the realm of fantasy? All that and more in the next instalment of ROAD TO OTAKU!

ARIGATŌ GOZAIMASU!


Zombie Land Saga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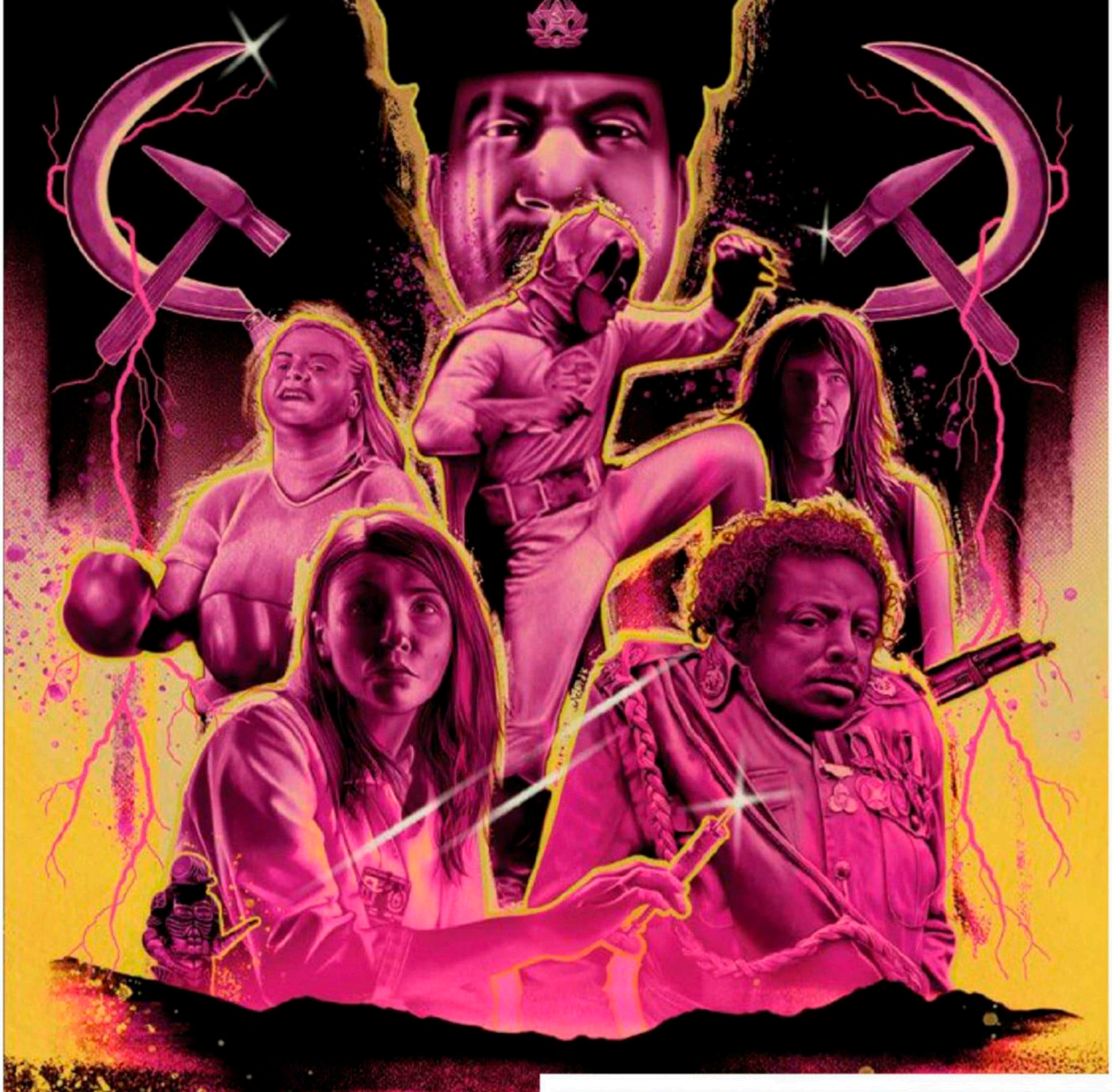
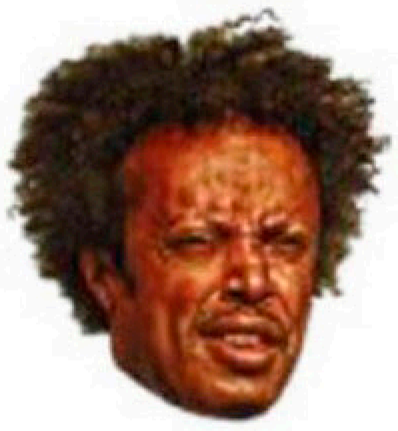


"I wanted to reflect his experience of not only being in different realities, but being in different realities with different bodies." – MIGUEL LLANSÓ

SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME...



Words: Jordan Royce

STARBURST talks with MIGUEL LLANSÓ, director of the fantastically surreal future cult classic, **JESUS SHOWS YOU THE WAY TO THE HIGHWAY**...

STARBURST: *Jesus Shows You the Way to the Highway* is a conceptually incredible movie. Where did the idea come from?
Miguel Llansó: The film is a collection of ideas. Basically, I wanted to make another film with Daniel Tadesse, who played the main character in my previous film, *Crumbs*. I knew I wanted to do a tragic-comedy about a hero who is lost, somehow, at the beginning; someone who gets to be a king. Then he gets a kingdom, but then he loses his position and goes back to work in a pizzeria, which I find very funny - this tragic condition. And then, of course, the ideas start to come around, as does the main idea, like reflections about power, about our inability to control our own fate and destiny.

We noted that there are a lot of ideas about what's reality and how there are certain avenues you can't trust with the so-called fake news, and there are certain parts of the political spectrum distorting things. Is that also an important theme to you?
Totally, it's very important to me. I think I tried to reflect on the disappearance of the body. Daniel's character Gagano changes his body many times: in one reality he has a mask, in another reality, he's a TV set! In each reality, the core of the person is the same, but the different realities mould him or make him a different being. I think this is what happens with the spiritual world. But the problem is that you don't decide the body that you want to have. Also it's difficult to live without a body. I wanted to reflect his experience of not only being in different realities, but being in different realities with different bodies.

The sequences set in the VR world are rendered in such a visually unique way; how did you achieve that look?
What we did is called pixilation - that is, basically, doing stop motion with real people. So what we did is move the real people as if there were models. We would take a picture, make them move an inch, take another picture, make them move, so it was a very exhausting and a very tough job. Our two main actors in those scenes are my brother and my best friend, so they were the guinea pigs of the experiment and they are were kind enough to do it. But it was tough because for shooting 130 seconds of film, we have to be there for three hours and they can't move because if they lost their movement, we wouldn't know where to pick up. There'd be no continuity; it would be a disaster. So every take could last for three or four hours where they have to do a movement of walking in a room or something. Human beings are not made for slo-mo!

How did you find those amazing places to film in both *Jesus* and *Crumbs*?
I've lived in Ethiopia for maybe three or four years, but I've been going for 10 years. I was working for the embassy before, so I was travelling around the country a lot. I had listed a collection of places that I said, 'I'll make a film here one day'. I still have more that I didn't use, but those places inspired me a lot. The place is kind of art. I don't write a screenplay and try to find the places but rather the places inspired me. Locations are what inspire me to make the films, and sometimes then change the screenplay. I usually ask if I can shoot there, and normally they are happy to collaborate. I have to first feel the place. Feel if it takes me to another time. I start imagining the stories that may happen there and they create nostalgia inside me. I need to portray them because these places are going to disappear; most of the places that I portrayed in *Crumbs* in Ethiopia have since vanished.

Your movies are populated by strange, diverse, and really interesting characters; was David Lynch an inspiration to you in any way?
Of course, David Lynch is a big inspiration! Don't dismiss the most absurd ideas, because there is always an intuitive connection if something appears in your mind. It's because two neurons have connected in a very strange way and they've created something. So David Lynch, definitely, is one of my great inspirations as well as Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali. I have a strong connection with the surrealist and also with the neorealist, because I find in the empathy of the neorealist is this idea of the tragic-comic condition of life.

What advice can you give to somebody who was where you were at the very beginning, who now wants to make a movie that's creative, but may not be commercial, and how do they move forward?
I cannot give much advice because I'm not making big films, I never had a penny in my life! What I can say is try to make films with your friends. In the 21st century, the power of collaboration, friendship, and love is bigger than you can imagine. We have made a film with many countries and with many people collaborating. All just because they liked it, and they somehow connected with the story. We had a British VFX supervisor [Paddy Eason] who had worked on things like *Harry Potter*, and he was working on our films creating some visual effects in Hollywood on Sundays! Why? Because we are friends. You can sit down and wait forever, or you can start doing things with your friends.

JESUS SHOWS YOU THE WAY TO THE HIGHWAY has just been released as a limited Blu-ray package with Miguel's previous film CRUMBS.

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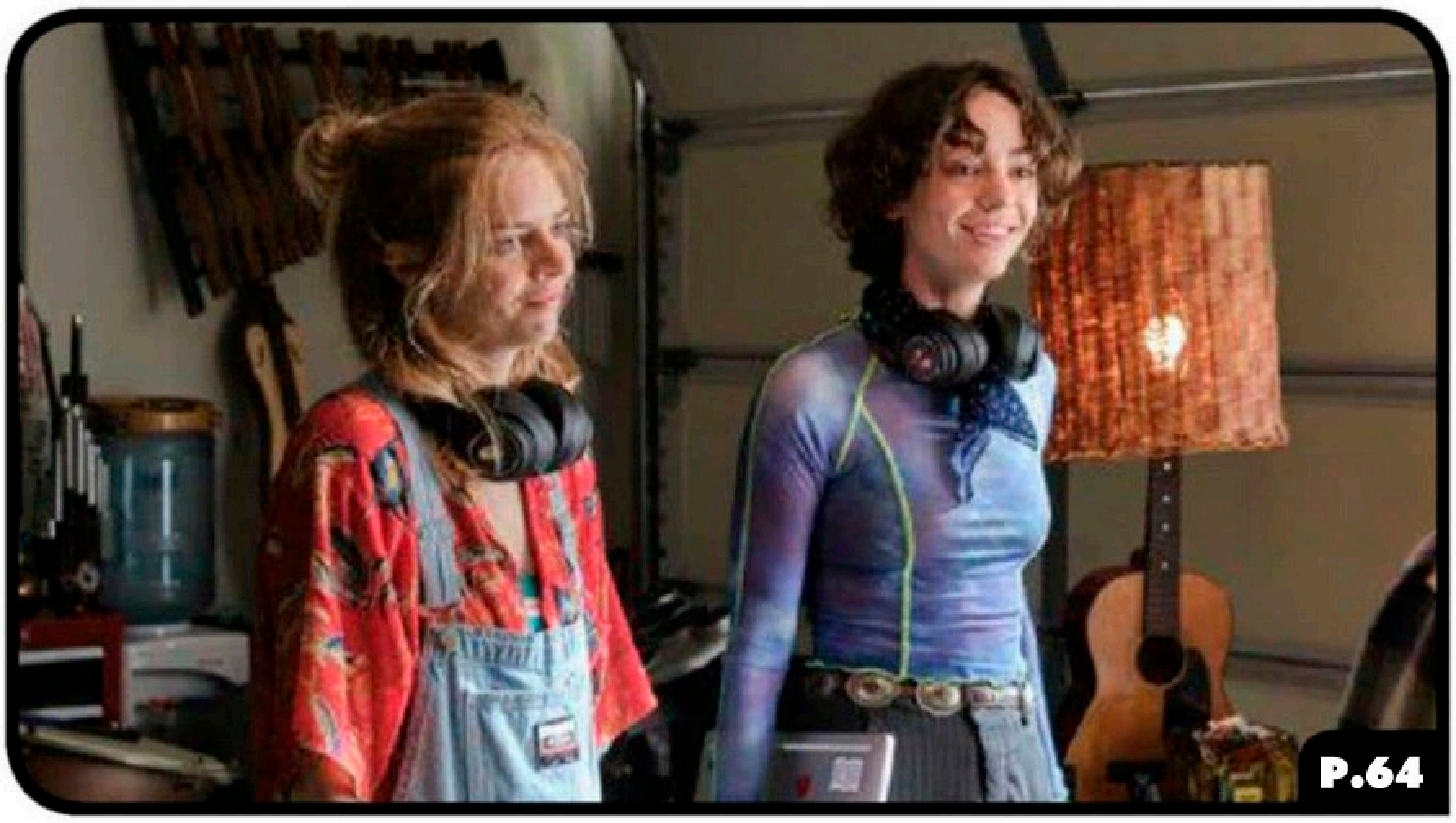

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SAINT MAUD

✦ ⑱ • RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 23RD

After months of many turgid to mid-range horrors slinking onto our home viewing platforms finally a bona fide genre masterpiece arrives, and deservedly in UK cinemas. Saint Maud is a skilfully crafted scare-fest augmented by fascinating characters, spellbinding performances, and terse storytelling that twists and terrifies as much as it enthrals.

Writer/director Rose Glass's feature debut tells the tale of a God-fearing palliative carer, Maud (Morfydd Clark), who is assigned to chain smoking, 49-year-old ex-dancer Amanda Kohl (Jennifer Ehle); a burnt-out diva with stage 4 lymphoma. Amanda initially seems to quietly consider her carer's religious convictions as idiosyncrasies so facetiously joins her in prayer. Maud is taken aback by her new patient's brazenness but the two bond when Amanda takes comfort/finds humour in Maud's dainty, ecumenical ways. The couple's friendship is tested further after Maud attempts to purify Amanda by ridding her life of sin. But when this is met with retaliation Maud realises saving Amanda's soul might cost her, her own.

The story delivers a dark and dreamy array of off-kilter characters in a slickly captured British seaside town. Repression, ulterior motives, manipulation, and psychosexual tension govern the lead characters, reinforcing Rose Glass' tightly structured tale with conflict, complexity, and subtext. This interplay, coupled with two sensational lead performances enrich the drama and heightens tension, especially when key character's crack in the latter half and the plot deviates from one of internal conflict into total terror and psychosis.

Glass works wonders with her foreboding, frontal lobe-probing, pulse-raising feature debut. Cinematographer Ben Fordesman's visuals also contribute to making Saint Maud so alluring and delectable. Rustic, near-burnt Gothic interiors recall the likes of Hammer, some Neil Jordan, and a nip of lurid '70s horrors like Audrey Rose, Full Circle, and Deep Red alongside José Larraz's Symptoms and Vampyres, by way of Polanski's Repulsion. Dimly lit golden browns and crimson room tones recall Peter Strickland's brilliant In Fabric, but Saint Maud is a slightly stronger work with surplus skull-rattling scares that liquify pineal glands and frazzle noggins to a fear-induced stupor while syphoning fluid from other quavering organs.

Saint Maud starts as seething and creepy but flits into an electrifying riptide through hell by way of religious lunacy; elegantly blooming into an introspective, hallucinogenic, unholy, tweaking nightmare about how the redeemed can derail into isolation, delusion, paranoia, and delirium. The story then simmers from a slow burning skin crawler to an explosive, electrifying, and frightening finale with the power to haunt your soul. It's both terrifying, beautiful, subversive, and skewed as though viewed through a warped glass of port. Saint Maud is not only one of the best horror films of the past decade, but probably one of the best British horrors of all time.

DANIEL GOODWIN

✦✦✦✦✦

THE NEW MUTANTS

15 • RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

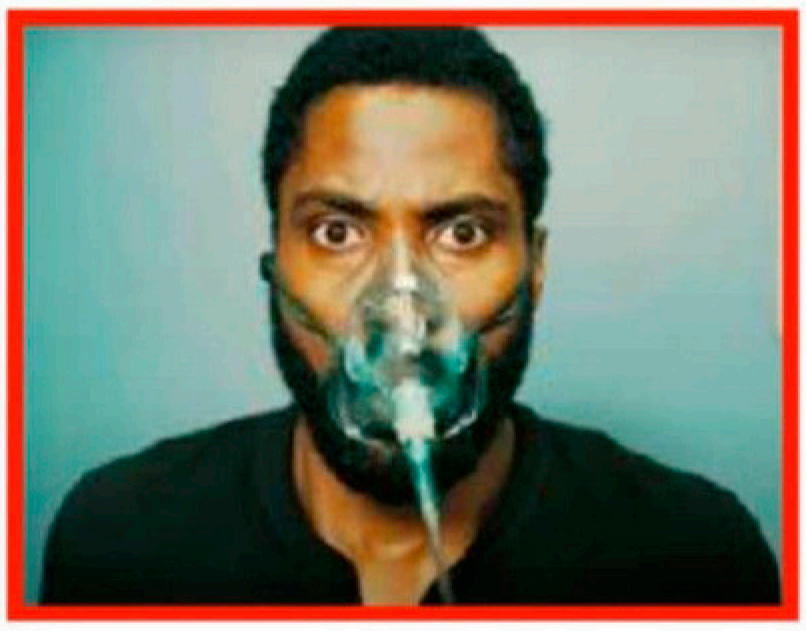
Launched in 2000, Fox's once-proud X-Men franchise comes to a horribly ignominious end in The New Mutants, a film left twiddling its thumbs on the shelf for two years. At best, this is a workmanlike 'Netflix Original' or a moderately budgeted extended pilot for another saga of super-powered kids finding their place in a world that doesn't understand them.

The first hour is catastrophically un-cinematic. Dani Moonstar (Blu Hunt) is orphaned when her home is devastated by a tornado and her father killed by some unseen monstrous entity. She awakes to find herself in a sinister, middle-of-nowhere hospital complex run by Dr Cecilia Reyes (Alice Braga) and told that she is a mutant with undefined powers. She and four fellow super-powered teens (including Maisie Williams as a lycanthropic mutant with a decent Scottish accent) are kept under constant surveillance and they all assume they are to become the next generation of X-Men. Suffice to say, they're not...

Director/co-writer Josh Boone clearly doesn't know whether he wants to make a superhero film or a horror movie, but the tropes of both genres don't sit well together, and the film is a tonal mess. It rouses itself from its torpor in the last half-hour with a few flashes of CGI and the arrival of the ferocious Demon Bear, but by now the film has sunk under the weight of its own irrelevance and an ending suggesting the birth of a thrilling new franchise is the definition of wishful thinking. Some good, well-intentioned performances aside, The New Mutants is a flat and pointless film we really need never concern ourselves with again.

PAUL MOUNT

★☆☆☆☆



TENET

15 • RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

"Don't try to understand it. Feel it," Clémence Poésy's scientist advises The Protagonist (John David Washington). Yet Christopher Nolan's latest is best served if you ignore these instructions and, rather than look for an emotional tether, embrace Tenet for its conceptual merits and technical excellence. This is Nolan on his home turf.

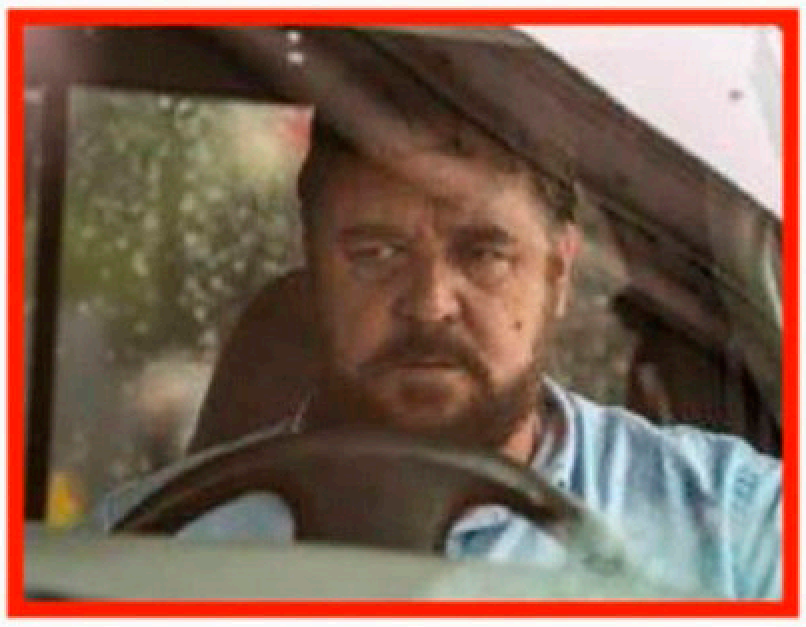
He deploys every tool in his signature toolbox, using nonlinear storytelling and stunning cinematography to explore an array of grand metaphysical themes and to deliver a sci-fi blockbuster that is Nolan through and through. The action slingshots back and forth, warping time and plot with dense, abstract theories of time and space. Together with minimal exposition, Tenet feels like 150 minutes of controlled chaos.

John David Washington's brilliantly understated performance is the eye of the storm. In a film of this scale where the rules are continuously rewritten, the steadfast protagonist grounds the story. What he doesn't offer is warmth. Tenet's coldness is what keeps it just short of greatness. When the audience is asked to emotionally invest in his and Kat's (Elizabeth Debicki, splendid as always) relationship, it feels undeserved. One can't help but think of Interstellar, a colossal film that rooted its grandeur in the love between a father and daughter and earned its viewers' joy, hope, and heartbreak. For Tenet, the viewer's investment is purely intellectual; there are no real stakes in the outcome beyond the satisfaction of seeing the pieces of the puzzle fall into place.

Nonetheless, Nolan delivers a staggeringly ambitious sci-fi and sleek, compact action-thriller all in one. Will it save cinema? Who's to say, but it sure is difficult to fault.

LAURA POTTIER

★★★★☆



UNHINGED

15 • RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Russell Crowe is on his best big bad belligerent bastard form in Unhinged as Tom Cooper, a psychopath with nothing to lose who turns newly-divorced single mother Rachel Hunter's day into a bloody nightmare. Derrik Borte's nail-biting thriller shamelessly splices the DNA of Spielberg's Duel with Schumacher's Falling Down to create a film that never knowingly undersells its potboiler potential as it becomes increasingly manic and adrenalized and, ultimately, completely fanciful.

Cooper has already done some Very Bad Things by the time he clashes with Rachel (Caren Pistorius) at the traffic lights where he has paused for breath. She's already running late and desperate to get her young son to school and still make her first business appointment of the day, so she irritably honks her horn. She refuses to apologise to the ursine Cooper for what he sees as her unnecessarily provocative behaviour and inadvertently sets in motion a chain of events which will turn her bad day into a blood-drenched terrible one.

Crowe is a huge and unstoppable force of nature here, a man-mountain who swats aside or crushes anyone who gets in the way of the retribution against an unjust world that he feels is rightfully his and his pursuit of Rachel (played with a desperate, exhausted sense of disbelief by Pistorius) is ruthless and remorseless and, in places, a bit ridiculous.

The last act tips into cheerful implausibility, requiring an inordinate level of suspension-disbelief, but for all its lunatic plot gymnastics and lack of narrative nuance, Unhinged is never less than a gripping and riveting ninety-odd minute thrill ride.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★☆

MAX WINSLOW AND THE HOUSE OF SECRETS

• RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 23RD

Five specially selected teenagers must battle a super-computer to win the ultimate prize in this family sci-fi adventure. Max Winslow (Sydne Mikelle) is a high school student who spends most of her time in her room, hacking computers and being a grade-A student when one day, local billionaire Atticus Virtue (Chad Michael Murray), invites five of his old high school's students to take part in a game of wits, guts, and intelligence at his teched-out mansion. But, as Max and her opponents begin to realise that this isn't as easy as it may seem, the group of flawed characters are pushed to their boundaries and changed forever.

The easiest way to describe this low-budget and choppy title is 'Willy Wonka meets Escape Room' – a simple premise that we've seen before but updated to incorporate the tech generation with such 2D generic characters as the brainiac, the gamer, the social media-obsessed, and the bully. Whereas this may seem like an interesting take on the formula, what lets this film down is the poorly written, unnatural dialogue between the characters, their unlikeable personalities, and an overall tone that feels very 'Nickelodeon'.

At times it shows a glimmer of intrigue and some impressive effects to hammer home the sci-fi nature before devolving into a disappointing anti-climactic mess with PS2-style VFX and laughably bad pacing. Max Winslow was definitely inspired by some classic ideas that have come before it and will ultimately provide some thrills and a strong moral message for a younger audience, but it sadly misses the mark due to the mediocre screenplay and performances.

JAMES PERKINS

★★☆☆☆

BILL AND TED FACE THE MUSIC

• RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 23RD

It's been three decades since the Wyld Stallions last rocked, and while Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure and Bogus Journey remain cult favourites, it seems odd to bring them back now – are they not, to put it kindly, past their best?

However, Face the Music is well aware of this; we rejoin Keanu Reeves and Alex Winter's duo in their 50s, with their band split up, marriages failing, and enthusiasm dwindling. Worse, they've never written the song prophesied to unite the world, and it's looking unlikely they ever will. What they need is a deadline, and when reality starts to collapse, they're given one – 75 minutes.

Rather than writing, Bill and Ted set off to steal the song from their future selves, prompting both zany antics and poignant reflection on a life not gone to plan. Have no fear; screenwriters Chris Matheson and Ed Solomon, who penned the first two films, know what they're doing with these characters.

But this isn't just a nostalgia fix, thanks to Billie and Thea – Bill and Ted's daughters, played by Samara Weaving and Brigette Lundy-Paine. Their boundless enthusiasm out-Bill-and-Teds the actual Bill and Ted, as they travel through time putting a band together for the imminent performance (and what a band!). If anything's amiss, it's that Lundy-Paine and Weaving don't get equal billing with Reeves and Winter; they certainly earn it.

Bill and Ted Face the Music shows how its done – a delight for fans and newbies alike. It's also the perfect catharsis for audiences nervous about returning to cinemas, full of music and comedy and hope. Bill and Ted are back. Cinema is back. Excellent.

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★

BECKY

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 28TH

15 • a ▶

The King of Queens himself breaks bad for this, his Big, Serious Role as an escaped prison convict and Nazi clan leader. Kevin James, best known as the doofy guy in Hitch, or Adam Sandler's friend, stretches his dramatic muscles, breaking into a family's home and menacing the milquetoast inhabitants within. The only member of the family not intimidated by murderous Dominick and his gang of heavies is thirteen-year-old Becky (Lulu Wilson); rebellious, bad-tempered, and struggling with serious anger management issues. When Dominick's home invasion escalates beyond what was supposed to be a simple in-and-out MacGuffin grab, Becky channels her inner John Rambo/McClane to give Dominick and his crew a taste of their own medicine. You know, kind of like Paul Blart: Mall Cop.

While directors Jonathan Milott and Cary Murnion do lean into the absurdism of pitting a thirteen-year-old girl against a gang of prison convicts, the story is played straight, especially where its characterisation of young Becky is concerned. This rumination on contagious violence goes all in on Becky's wrath; anger and hatred let off the leash, and some truly shocking (but satisfying) gore to boot (take that, Nazis!). None of which would work without Wilson as Becky, who steals the whole show and puts her adult co-stars to shame. Sorry, Kevin James. Given the story, it's ironic that the limelight should be stolen from its big name star, who is aggressively fine as Dominick. Kevin James glowers and stomps, but doesn't have much to do, aside from a pivotal scene of gross-out ultraviolence in the middle, and showdown at the end. He's overshadowed in the acting stakes by Wilson and, physically, by Robert Mailet, who plays lead thug Apex. Even the perpetually artificial Joel McHale makes a better show of it, as Becky's well-meaning but useless dad.

In taking its fight so seriously, Becky frequently stretches the limits of plausibility, and relies on too much contrivance for comfort. But it's exceptionally well-made and a lot of fun, with a great (if underutilised) cast. It's Home Alone meets You're Next for the 'Becky' generation.

JOEL HARLEY

✦✦✦✦✧

MULAN

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

• Disney+ PREMIER ACCESS

The highly anticipated live-action Mulan is here, and it's a fascinating experiment for Disney. Mulan is enough of a departure from the 1998 original to discourage comparison, and it's that bold, almost brazen approach that elevates director Niki Caro's ambitious adaptation. Unlike the near shot-for-shot Beauty and the Beast, The Lion King, and Aladdin remakes, this new realisation of an ages-old ballad dares to try new things, with mixed results.

The film stands tall on the strength of lead actress Liu Yifei and the resounding power of its message, but its handling of magic and mysticism feels noticeably less inspired (and woefully lacking in the Eddie-Murphy-voiced-dragon department). Without Mushu, its fantastical elements have little bearing on Mulan's evolution as a character, and the script reflects that. It never leans hard enough into its mysticism to feel like a fully realised part of that world. Even the witch coaching and coaxing her feels shoehorned in, a shame considering that particular dynamic's potential.

Thankfully, though, Caro's reworking is inspired and resonant enough to warrant a viewing or two. Will Mulan enjoy the longevity of its animated counterpart? Probably not, but the film does place its emotional beats artfully and tactfully, and the result is a well-meaning remake that honours the Ballad of Mulan not through faithfulness to its text, but through expansion of its themes.

Despite Mulan's lopsided quality, it excels at reimagining the heroine as strong, gentle, and positively brimming with don't-screw-with-me energy. Greatness may elude it, but its kind-hearted approach and beating heart won't be lost on people who open themselves to them.

HAYDEN MEARS

✦✦✦

THE MAN WHO LAUGHS (1928)

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 17TH

• Blu-ray

Though best remembered for inspiring the face of DC's Joker, The Man Who Laughs, a 1928 silent movie directed by Paul Leni for Universal, is an important part of horror history. It now gets its first ever UK home release courtesy of Eureka.

Based on a Victor Hugo novel, it's an eighteenth century-set tale. Conrad Veidt stars as Gwynplaine, who as a child had his face mutilated into a disturbing grin. He scrapes a living as a carnival performer, amusing audiences with his permanent 'laugh', but when Queen Anne's court learns of his existence and true aristocratic heritage, the subsequent scheming throws this life into turmoil.

The movie packs a lot in – romance, political intrigue, swashbuckling action, and an enjoyably anti-authoritarian energy – but at the centre is Veidt's incredible performance. You can see how he inspired the Joker, but Gwynplaine is a different character entirely, much more sympathetic, unable to believe that his blind companion could truly love him were she able to see his face; this heart-rending take on living with a deformity puts the film ahead of its time.

Yet it also had a massive influence on horror cinema; Leni's eerie Gothic visuals strongly informed the later Universal classics, and two of his main collaborators here – art director Charles Hall and make-up virtuoso Jack Pierce – would help define that series.

The 1080p presentation comes from Universal's 4K restoration, and there's a choice of soundtrack – a recently recorded score by the Berklee School of Music, or the (much tinnier) original movietone. Behind the scenes interviews and featurettes explore the film's place in cinema history, plus there's a booklet of essays.

KIERON MOORE

✦✦✦✦

COVEN OF EVIL

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

15 · prime video

Young journalist Joe (John Thacker) is impressed with his first published piece exposing the practices of witchcraft in the community. One person not happy with the article is coven leader Evie (Samantha Moorhouse), who invites Joe to experience a real coven and put right the inaccuracies of his original piece and get a better understanding of what they do as Wiccans. He's soon in the rather pleasant surroundings of the coven, which resembles a farm more than a realm of satanic worship. He's enticed by the younger members of the coven, particularly Talia (Lauren Ellen Wilson) and terrified by Evie's husband Zander (Craig R. Mellor). Invited into a ceremony, Jo gets a little too 'into' things and he ends up having sex with Talia as the others eagerly watch on. His assumptions that the rituals are all just an excuse for a sex party seem to be accurate until he meets Alice (Laura Peterson), who appears to be being held captive in the house. Despite being forbidden from speaking to her, Joe tries to get to the bottom of what's going on.

Written and directed by Matthew J. Lawrence, Coven of Evil is a low budget UK film and it shows. That said, the cast may be variable - something forgivable in a movie at this level - but the story is enough to engage the more ardent viewer. Far from being a clone of Midsommer or a take on The Wicker Man, Lawrence gives us an interesting escape-and-chase-style angle to go along with the pagan rituals and to-be-expected sacrifice, which keeps the attention.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

★★★☆☆

PROJECT POWER

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

15 · NETFLIX

When a strange pill – one that assigns a random superpower to its taker – forces its way through the bloodstream of the sun-soaked and scenic streets of New Orleans, destiny brings together the mysterious Art (Jamie Foxx), drug dealer and aspiring-rapper Robin (Dominique Fishback), and the exhausted NOPD detective Frank (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), to both halt and unmask the drug's sinister creator.

Between Frank rumbling with a fiery Machine Gun Kelly cameo, and Art battling to the death with animal-like enemies, Project Power gives you a heap of popcorn-worthy brawls. Some of the best scenes occur when our trio are teamed up, and proof of that comes in the form of a Resident Evil boss-type collision. In addition to the plot elements exploring detective Frank being tired of a corrupt system and Robin rapping her way to life's meaning, lies Art's crippling past. As he tries to find the source behind a ruthless pill that's destroying the city, harsh flashbacks show us exactly what drives him and why his acts are justified.

In the same way that Bright (another major Netflix Original with franchise aspirations) merges fantasy so well with real life, Project Power achieves this by having superpowered beings sewn into its natural, urban fabric. Directors Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman, and writer Mattson Tomlin have delivered a fun, well-crafted sci-fi actioner with an engaging concept, the scope of which certainly warrants further exploration in a sequel.

ANDREW DEX

★★★☆☆

AQUASLASH

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

15 · a · sky store

Aquaslash comes across as Porky's meets Friday the 13th in a water park. Unfortunately, it doesn't reach the highs of either of those franchises' lowest points.

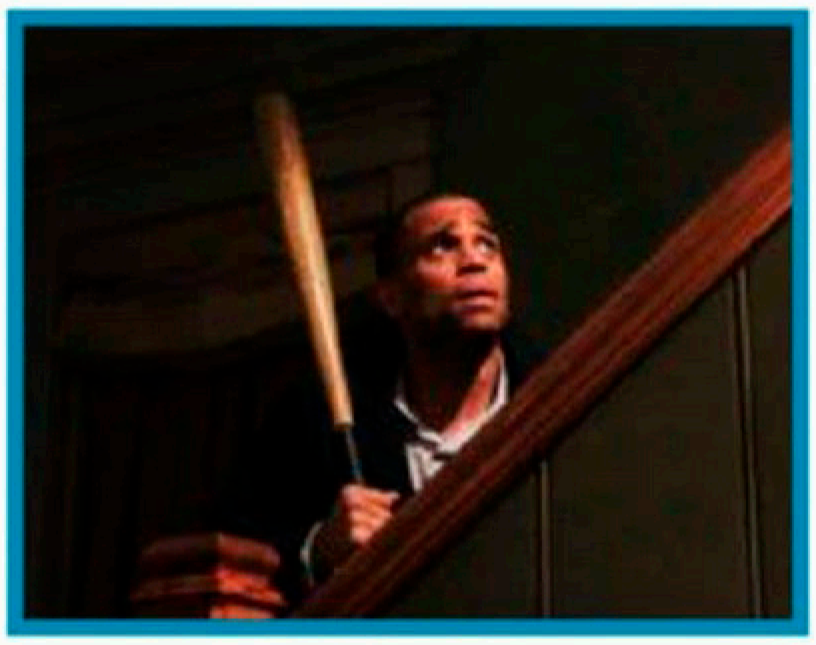
A group of college kids are at Wet Valley Water Park to celebrate and let off steam. There's friction between the teens, with the 'jock' types already picking on people, and lots of sleeping around behind each other's backs. Oh, and there was a murder at the park exactly 35 years ago.

Writer/director Renaud Gauthier (Discopath) tries hard to make this feel like it comes from the golden age of both the slasher and teen sex comedy genres, but nothing really hits as it should as it's all too forced and obvious. If you were to take a drink every time a character says something about death ("Oh you're killing me", "You're dead, asshole", etc), you'd be Oliver Reed-level pickled. Any subplots involving the cheating, bed-hopping park managers or the lusty teens are lost as we don't care enough about them. Even a strand with an estranged father of one of the kids doesn't provide anything other than a bit of slasher fodder.

On the plus side, the build up to the film's big set piece is handled marvellously. It had to really, since this is all the film actually has, but there's plenty of tension built and the gore effects are sickeningly impressive. Sadly, it plays like an extended segment from a Final Destination film. Even at just over an hour, the story is stretched thinner than the girls' bikini straps.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

★★☆☆☆



JACOB'S LADDER

RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 5TH

15 · DVD

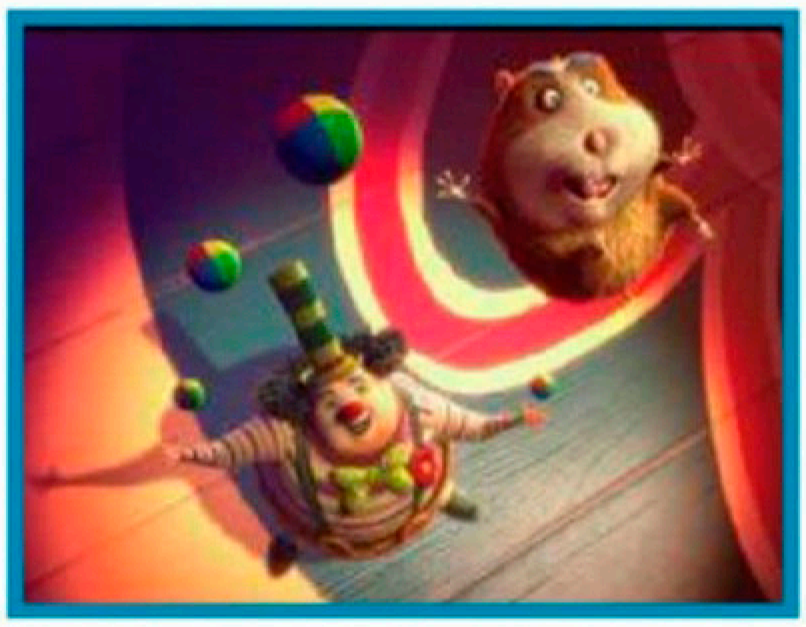
Once again, Hollywood regurgitates another classic for contemporary audiences but botches every attempt to make it unique and invigorating. This predominantly drab 're-imagining' of Adrian Lyne's brooding horror does at least try to deviate from the 1990 original, but does it so artlessly and with disregard to - or obliviousness of - what made Lyne's film so compelling. Director David M. Rosenthal shreds Lyne's striking style, substituting his urban noir palette for a weak insipidness similar to that of a TV movie.

The remake's story tells a similar tale of husband/father/doctor Jacob Singer (Michael Ealy) who is approached by a frazzled ex-army vet, Paul (Joseph Sikora), claiming to be a friend of Jake's late brother Isaac (Jesse Williams). Paul tells Jake that Isaac is still alive and leads him to a secret society of troubled ex-vets linked to a military-sanctioned drug called HDA. Jacob investigates, but soon starts experiencing intense hallucinations that warp his reality and make him distrust his once close friends and family. The plot philanders with novel concepts but fails to utilise them efficiently. A conspiracy relating to Jake's family intrigues but isn't proficiently employed to convey the potent paranoia that permeated Lyne's original. The characters are also not as complex as they were in 1990. Key sequences are inelegantly replicated and feel enforced and wedged with a brazen lack of care and élan.

The original's ominous air was a key component to its nightmare surrealism working so well, and made weird scenes with monsters and demons more tangible. For director Rosenthal to not retain that, or replace it with something equally distinctive, is an unpardonable blooper.

DANIEL GOODWIN

★★☆☆☆



ANIMAL CRACKERS

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

U · NETFLIX

It's been a long journey for Scott Christian Sava and Tony Bancroft's Animal Crackers, an adaptation of Sava's own graphic novel, but it's finally found a home on Netflix and it's a warm-hearted little film that ought to keep the little ones both entertained and hopeful.

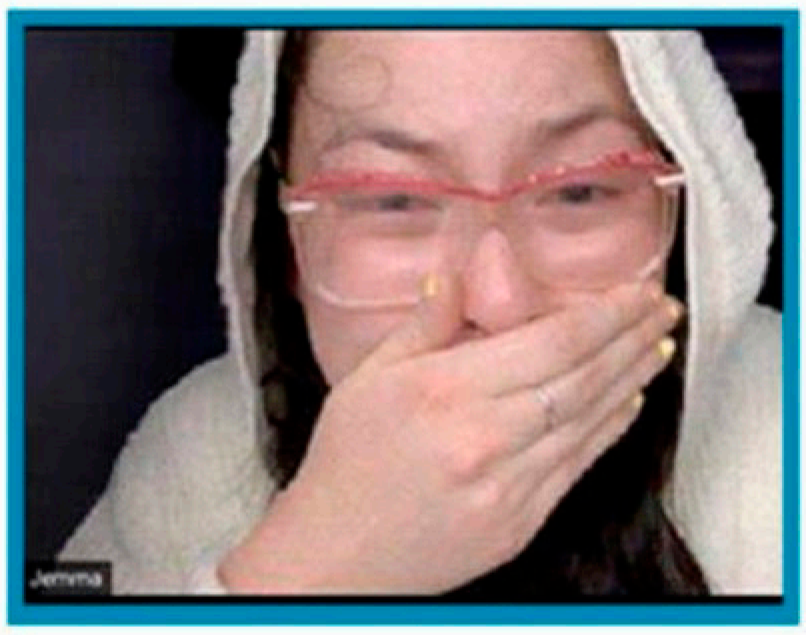
When circus owners Bob and Talia perish in a fire, they bequeath Bob's nephew Owen (John Krasinski) a box of animal crackers, which are the source of the circus' magical star attractions. However, will Owen and his wife Zoe (Emily Blunt) be able to rekindle the love they had for this circus when they were kids, and how will they deal with the former's nefarious uncle Horatio (Ian McKellen), who believes the circus and its secrets are rightfully his to take and profit from?

The characters are warm (save for some purposely intended to be irritating, such as Patrick Warburton's corporate muscle-head suck-up Brock), and the voice work strong, with some breakouts among its pretty starry cast. McKellen is clearly having a ball as the baddie, as is Gilbert Gottfried as the henchman who narrates his own life, and Sylvester Stallone makes a surprising appearance as Bullet-Man. Likewise, Bear McCreary's music has its moments too, meshing well with some good visual colour and pop.

The climax is inventive and makes the most of the film's strong animation and character designs (which evokes the work of Laika). Animal Crackers may not be perfect but it's a good directorial debut for Sava that is ultimately lots of fun and offers families a wacky afternoon's viewing.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

★★★☆☆



HOST

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

18 · SHUDDER

A group of friends get together on Zoom during quarantine to take part in a séance in the new Shudder original Host, directed by Rob Savage.

The world as we know it has changed with the pandemic, and with film suffering because of it, it's a prime time for creators to really push the boat out and innovate in order to keep the industry alive - and Savage, along with his writing partners Jed Shepherd and Gemma Hurley, have done just that with an ingenious horror that provides tons of natural, and supernatural, scares.

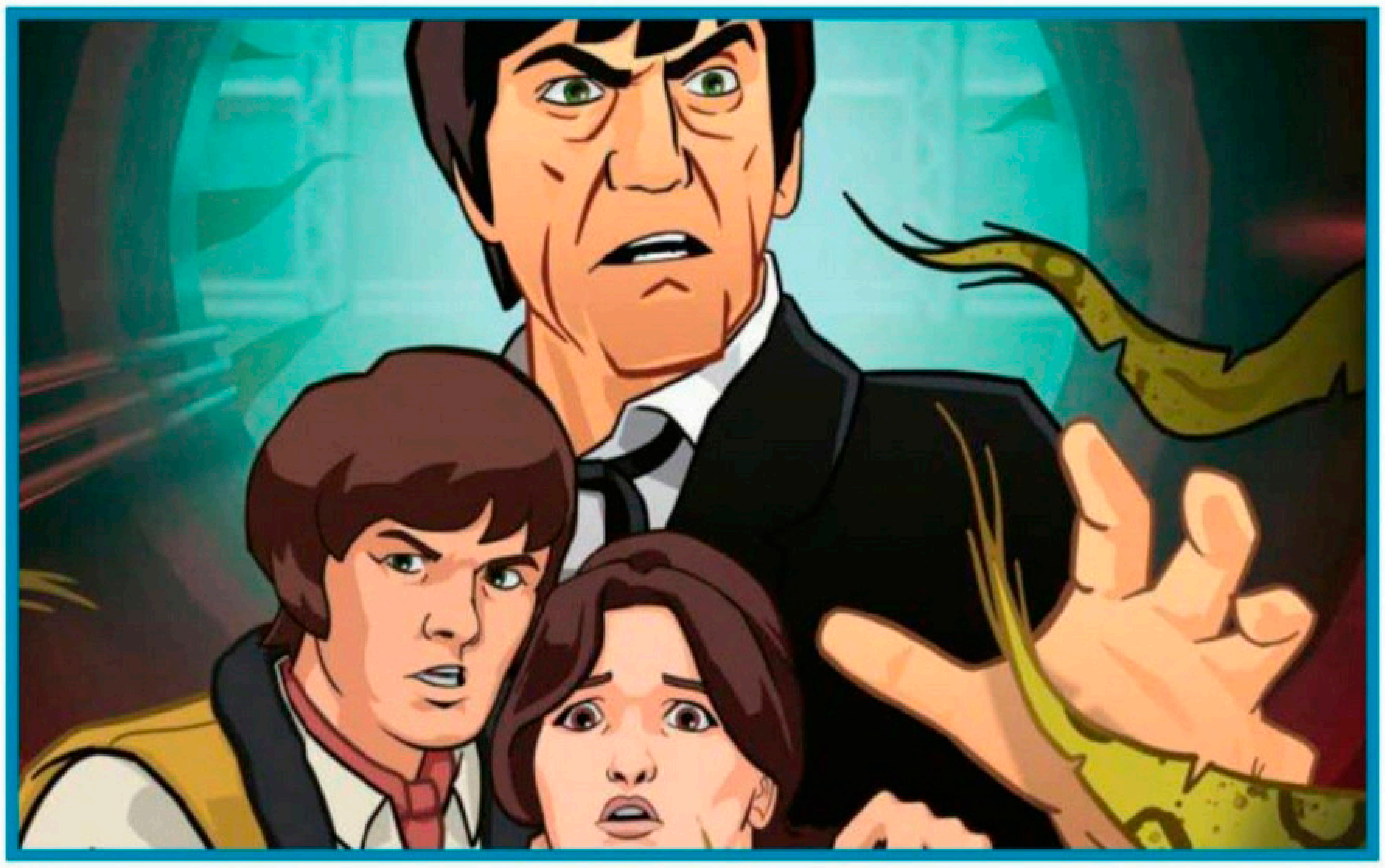
Haley (Bishop) invites her friends Caroline (Ward), Jemma (Moore), Emma (Webb), Radina (Drandova), and Teddy (Edward Linard) to join her in a fun evening of contacting the afterlife with medium Seylan (Baxter). But Haley and the group unwittingly unleash a demonic presence with dire consequences.

Whereas we've seen this screen-life genre of film fairly recently with the likes of Unfriended, what Host does to set itself apart from the rest is really ground the story in the heart of the pandemic and elevate the real-life fears of those watching while also giving us strong characters that actually have great chemistry.

The film also utilises some very effective in-camera effects be it practical or taking advantage of the tools that Zoom has - including constructive use of the video conferencing app's free limit of one hour. While the ending could have been stronger, this doesn't detract from the fact that Host is a supremely well-crafted, anxiety-inducing thrill-ride from start to finish - and the fact that it was all made during quarantine is a technical marvel in itself.

JAMES PERKINS

★★★★★



DOCTOR WHO: FURY FROM THE DEEP

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

PG · DVD Blu-ray

Broadcast just once in the UK in 1968, its tapes wiped (along with well over a hundred other early Doctor Who episodes) in the '70s, Fury from the Deep has a special place in the affections of long-time fans. Recovered censored clips from Australia – included on this new three-disc set – suggest a creepy, atmospheric story that, unusually for the series at the time, took its inspiration from events in the contemporary world.

With North Sea Gas offering plentiful supplies of cheap energy for the UK in the late 1960s, the Second Doctor and his friends pitch up at a coastal refinery infiltrated by a hideous alien weed creature that thrives on the emergent gas and uses it as a weapon. It's no surprise, then, that Victor Pemberton's lively six-part serial has been selected as the latest in the BBC's strategy of animating missing episodes from the show's canon.

Inevitably, though, this new release is very much an interpretation of the serial rather than a recreation. Crystal clear off-air audio recordings are married to visuals that are clearly far grander than a 1960s BBC TV budget could manage and yet despite a few animation niggles this is still a pacey, hugely watchable realisation of one of the great 1960s Doctor Who serials, which even manages to deliver a tear-jerking finale the 21st century series itself would be proud of as the Doctor's companion Victoria (Deborah Watling) takes her leave of the TARDIS.

Decent extras include fun documentaries and the usual collections of commentaries and galleries, with the main feature presented in colour and, for the diehards, black and white.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★☆

YOU SHOULD HAVE LEFT

RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 12TH

18 · DVD Blu-ray a ▶

Two decades after their eerie supernatural thriller Stir of Echoes, writer/director David Koepp and Kevin Bacon reunite for another ghostly yarn, this time about a wealthy family who encounter mischievous, dimension shifting spirits while holidaying in Wales. Koepp conjures a sporadically creepy air to twist his classic haunted house style tale, then strengthens it with affable characters and decent performances.

Bacon's retired banker with a chequered past pairs well with Amanda Seyfried's testy, troubled actor, Susanna, but the film's stand-out performance is from Avery Essex, who displays remarkable range and conviction as the couple's death-obsessed daughter, Ella. Kooky locals recall those classic Hammer Horror types who deny the castle's existence, combined with a League of Gentlemen-style 'local' weirdness. A furtive property owner augments mystery, fortifying the movie's atmosphere along with a key character's curious history and another's teased deceit.

Terrifying nightmares, time-shift sequences and twisted hypnotherapy scenes are eloquently spun into a succinct and pithy script, bar a slightly shoe-horned prologue. Tension amplifies as family conflicts arise, buttressing paranoia, coupled with the revelation that Theo (Bacon's character) is particularly sensitive to scares. During these instances, Koepp demonstrates genre-savvy despite a lack of sharp frights, the type of which are synonymous with contemporary ghost horrors. This could be a good thing as most modern jump-scares are passé and hackneyed, but viewers expecting them could be disappointed.

Koepp's eerie, enjoyable potboiler gets by on endearing, complex characters, a shadowy Krueger-like antagonist, and well-deployed comedy to counteract the chills. Contradictorily, those expecting anything too ground-breaking or conventional may feel short-changed but general audiences and horror fans should be satisfied.

DANIEL GOODWIN

★★★☆☆

LA LLORONA

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

15 • SHUDDER

Jayro Bustamante's La Llorona is one of the year's absolute masterpieces. Not to be confused with 2019's Conjuring-verse flick The Curse of La Llorona, Bustamante's film is a different beast entirely, and a transfixing but tragic piece of expert filmmaking.

Former Guatemalan dictator Enrique Monteverde (Julio Diaz) is on trial for genocides committed on the native Mayans back in the '80s, and as the public rage increases and this controversial figure faces pressure - forcing him behind closed doors - his family start asking questions and he begins hearing and seeing things. La Llorona is a powerful marriage of the hispanic legend, with a shattering story examining one of the many horrors of human history; a slowly unfolding political horror, where the atrocities of the past seep into the current, and the ghosts of history seek redemption. The real terror here is humanity, or rather a lack of it, as the film shows how the cruelty of mankind, and powerful men in particular, is so easily buried by time, passed off by law or even wilfully ignored. Bustamante and Lisandro Sanchez's screenplay shows that reality is the hardest thing to face, as the furious crowds demanding justice they'll never be given, or the detailing of abhorrent experiences, are equally as frightening as the spectral occurrences subtly building throughout.

Margarita Kenéfic (as Enrique's wife Carmen) and María Mercedes Coroy (as new houseworker Alma) are particularly powerful in this twist on 'the wailing woman'; one which haunts viewers not with gore or jump scares but with the omnipotence of history and the pain of its many victims.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

★★★★★

WIDOW'S POINT

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

15 •

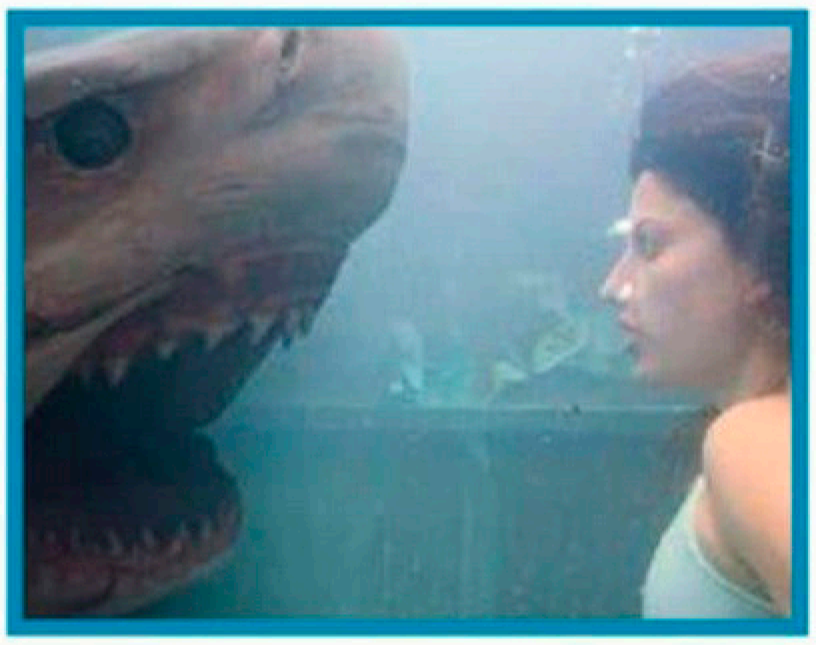
Adapted for the screen from Richard and Billy Chizmar's 2018 novel of the same name, Widow's Point is a time-flipping 'supernatural horror' that's agreeable enough but unlikely to give many viewers' sleepless nights. Novelist Thomas Livingstone is researching a new book about the grim, body-strewn history of the titular lighthouse. As a promotional gambit, he agrees to spend a weekend alone on site, videoing his experiences and delving further into the place's cautionary past.

Isolated haunted buildings have an obvious appeal to budget-conscious indie filmmakers. The real-life Dunkirk Lighthouse on New York's Lake Erie provides a suitably atmospheric setting although, as a piece of architecture, it's a functional rather than an awe-inspiring example of the form. While director Gregory Lamberson's screenplay fleshes out the Chizmars' more solitary tale with extra characters, most of the weight of Widow's Point rests on the shoulders of Craig Sheffer as Livingstone. Before the focus shifts almost entirely to the foolish author, several scenes re-enact the lighthouse's dark backstory. In these more populated segments, the overall acting quality dips noticeably.

As Livingstone loses contact with the world outside, and spooky goings-on impact on his perception of reality, his psyche begins to unravel. Sheffer does not hold back in depicting Livingstone's disconnected, dissociated state. These are the film's strongest moments, their impact reinforced by some tight editing. The glimpses of ghoulish spectres, ghostly hands reaching out to grasp unsuspecting flesh, and the eerie sounds of disembodied voices: all of this is competently done, but none of this build-up is particularly scary. And even Sheffer's determination to give it his all is not enough to salvage the rushed and underwhelming finale.

RICH CROSS

★★☆☆☆



DEEP BLUE SEA 3

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When The Hatter asked Alice, "Have I gone mad?" in Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, she responded, "I'm afraid so. You are entirely bonkers", well, we certainly get that feeling here, because Deep Blue Sea 3 is an absolute blast! Audiences know what they want from this type of film and director John Pogue delivers.

As the escaped genetically-enhanced killing machines from the previous film make their way to a remote settlement with a thriving sea bed (aka food glorious food), the dedicated research team diving there soon find more is afoot than aggressive bull sharks, as a group of people hired to track and kill the sharks soon arrive, escalating events further!

The Waterworld-esque setting makes for a unique backdrop to some impressively staged action, which goes along at a great 'ol lick featuring well-constructed (and rather original at points) shark set pieces, decent characters, and a most welcome respect and admiration for the beautiful animal taking centre stage. Much like the inferior but fun for what it was Deep Blue Sea 2, a conservationist backbone runs through this screenplay, which highlights real climate worries and issues. Such love and admiration is not always found in this genre and should be celebrated. In fact, this sequel shows better than most just why humanity has so much to answer for. Deep Blue Sea 3 is not only great fun, but it's infinitely superior to even some of the bigger-budget, cinema-released shark fare.

Bonus points too for having a heroic shark called Sally!

JACK BOTTOMLEY

★★★★☆

MAN OF TOMORROW

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

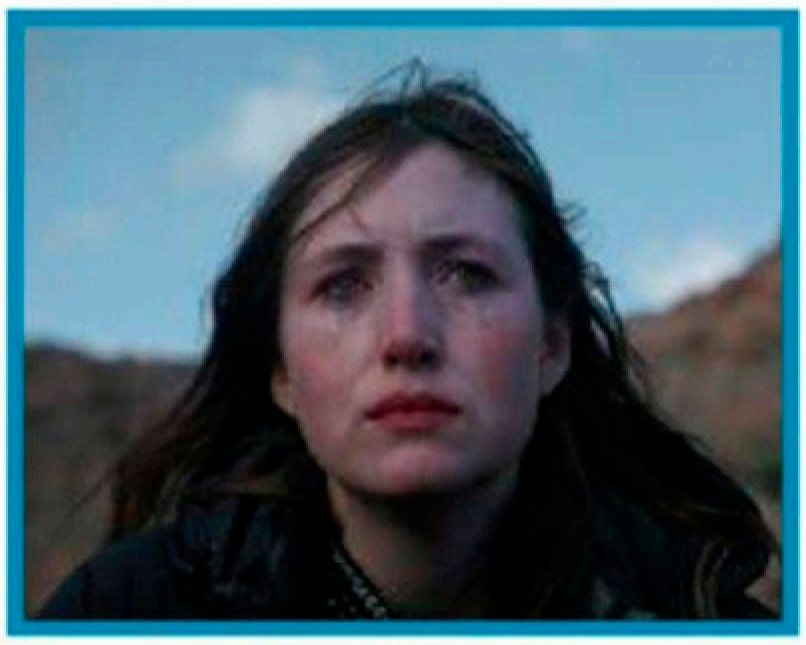
With the phenomenal Justice League Dark: Apokolips War bringing the DC Animated Movie Universe to a close earlier this year, the world of animated DC pictures is a fresh canvas. And now, the formative days of the Big Blue Boy Scout's rise to herodom gets an all-new adventure in Man of Tomorrow. Here we find a Clark Kent (Darren Criss) who is serving as an intern at the Daily Planet while also moonlighting as a masked hero. Unsure of himself or his place in the world, this is an angle to Clark that's rarely been focused on in an animated feature as the film pulls plentiful elements of characterisation from the fantastic Superman: Birthright comic book run.

A heartfelt and poignant look at Kal-El's journey, the cast of Man of Tomorrow all deliver this tale wonderfully. Criss makes for a stoic but vulnerable Superman, Alexandra Daddario's Lois Lane is forever fiery in hunting down the big stories of the day, Zachary Quinto devilishly devours every scene his Lex Luthor is in, Ike Amadi absolutely nails the calm demeanour of the Martian Manhunter, and Ryan Hurst's gravel-drenched delivery is an inspired choice for Lobo.

Visually, director Chris Palmer and animation veteran Butch Lukic have developed a vibrant, smooth style here for characters and landscapes that are very much in the wheelhouse of Archer – and it works brilliantly for Man of Tomorrow. Elsewhere on this release, the early look at '70s-set martial arts picture Batman: Soul of the Dragon is equally guaranteed to put a smile on your face.

ANDREW POLLARD

★★★★☆



SHE DIES TOMORROW

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Writer/director Amy Seimetz's film, She Dies Tomorrow, is not horror in the most traditional of senses. At no point is a monster ever seen. At best, it's a series of flashing multicoloured lights upon the faces of those whom it has effected, but for the most part, that which afflicts the titular Amy (Kate Lyn Sheil), her sponsor Jane (Jane Adams), and a spiraling cast of friends and acquaintances can best be described as a memetic idea. Amy has determined that she will die tomorrow. It's more than just a feeling to her. This is an idea innately known and held.

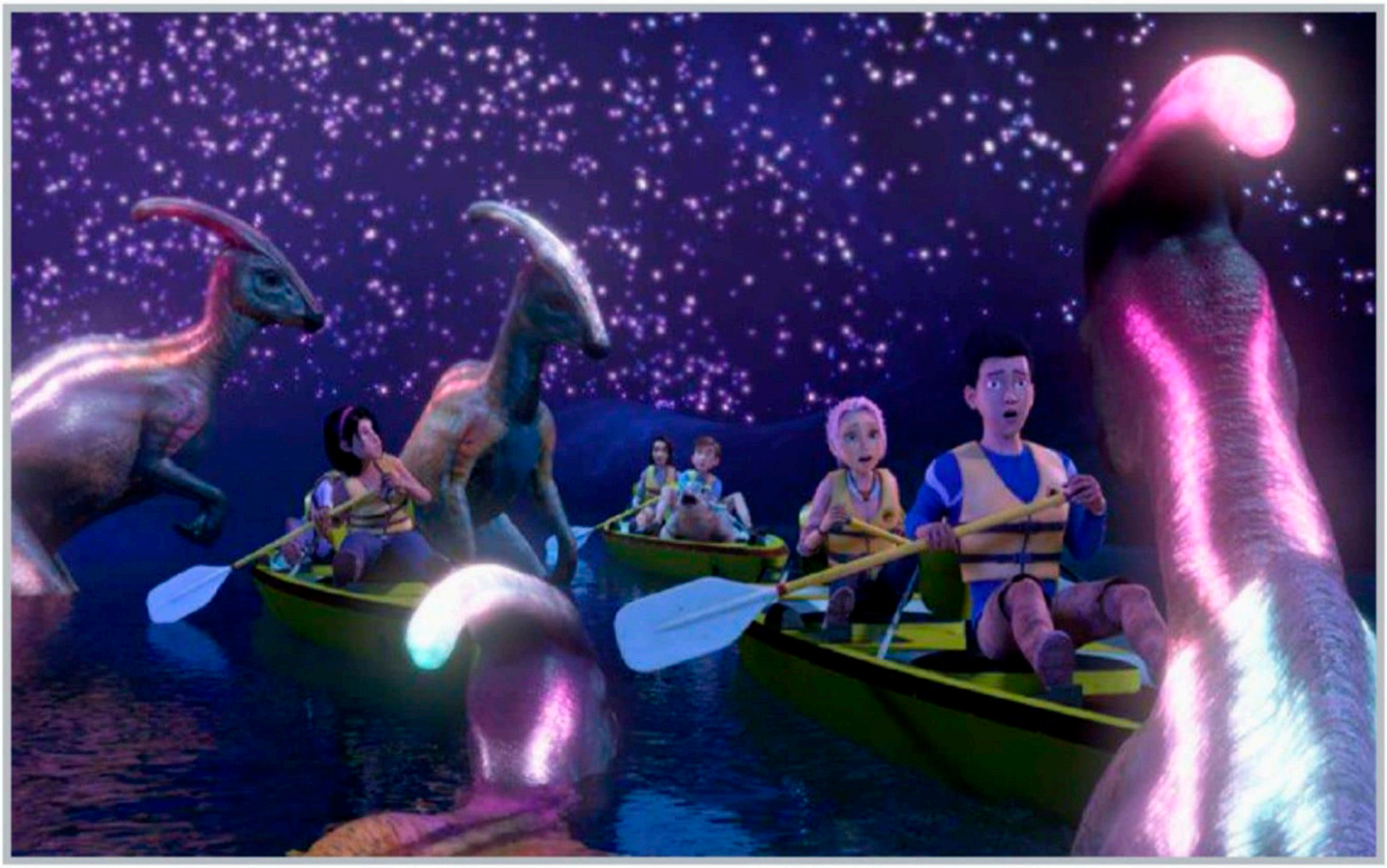
Now, this could all be due to the fact that Amy has relapsed and began drinking again, which would certainly explain why she's racing dune buggies in the dark and cleaning her patio with a leaf blower while wearing a sequined dress. However, the way in which it transfers from person to person, simply by being said, brings about the concept of an idea as a sickness, which is absolutely fascinating.

Once infected, all affected see their false fronts immediately collapse and fall away. Tilly (Jennifer Kim) admits to Brian (Tunde Adebimpe) that she was just waiting for his father to die in order to break up with him, and he feels no malice from her statement, as he agrees that it was going nowhere. It's as if by embracing the concept of one's impending mortality, a person is able to live more honestly.

She Dies Tomorrow aches with tension and possibility, and maintains that through to the last frame, refusing to let the viewer off with easy answers.

NICK SPACEK

★★★★☆

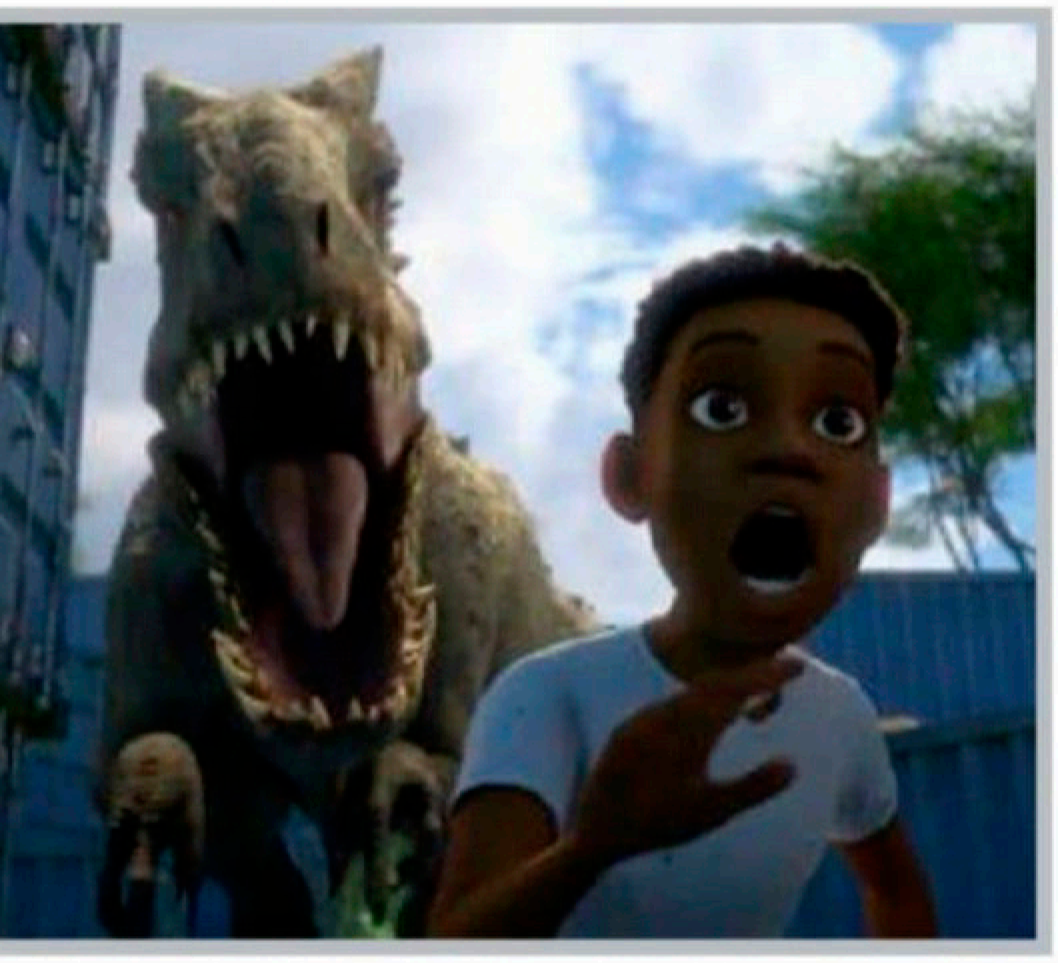


JURASSIC WORLD: CAMP CRETACEOUS

REVIEWED: SEASON 1 · NETFLIX (FROM SEPTEMBER 18TH)

When news came down the pike that an animated Jurassic Park series was heading our way, the expectation was for a bright, breezy, and frivolous series of 20-minute escapology adventures - kids running from T-Rex and dodging the toothy bite of doom while flinging out snappy quips. And while Camp Cretaceous certainly has its fair share of zippy one-liners, there's far more meat on the bone than you might expect for a show of this kind.

Spread across eight 24-minute episodes, Camp Cretaceous follows the adventures of six kids spending a fortnight at Camp Cretaceous, the children's area of Jurassic World on Isla Nublar. Our lead character is Darius, a young, creature-crazy kid who, like so many kids of his age, delves deep into the history of the dinosaurs, soaking up as much knowledge as he can while playing a Jurassic Park VR video game, the completion of which wins him his ticket to Camp (announced by no less a luminary than the real star of the Jurassic series, Mr DNA).



The Camp is impressive, a treehouse high above the ground, giving them an incredible view of the park, but that's not enough for these inquisitive kids, and so the adventure begins as they sneak out at night to check on the 'compys' (encountering angry raptors instead), sneak around the tunnels below the island to get up close and personal with a Carnosaur they nickname Toro, and get caught up in a stampede in some familiar-looking gyrospheres. It's here that the penny drops; the story we're watching takes place at the same time as Jurassic World as our snooping kids learn about the Indominus Rex and get embroiled in a series of adventures that see them chased across the island, desperately trying to get to the ferry and safety while avoiding the monstrous Mosasaurus, the Indominus, and the Carnosaur, who is a constant, ever-present threat.

There's a lot to admire about the series, and plenty of surprises too. Camp Cretaceous has an emotional weight that frequently catches you off guard, with some genuine moments of peril and thoughtful themes behind a soundtrack by Leo Birenberg that takes the scores of John Williams and Michael Giacchino and expands upon them beautifully (this show absolutely deserves a soundtrack release). Indeed, the only disappointment is the character animation, which is passable at best (if Lucasfilm delivered animation of this quality in a Star Wars series there'd be riots), a surprise given the franchise we're talking about. However, don't let that distract from a story that complements Jurassic World very well and ends in an unexpected way that absolutely leaves the door open for further adventures. With a much-needed step up in animation quality and the time to bridge the gap between Jurassic World and Fallen Kingdom, you could be looking at a real hit for Netflix and a worthy addition to the Jurassic story.

MARK NEWBOLD

✦✦✦✦✧

MUPPETS NOW

REVIEWED: SEASON 1

Disney+

It's long been a point of frustration for the Kermit crowd that Disney hasn't known what to do with the Muppets these past few years, but at last now the gang is back on our (small) screens with Disney+'s Muppets Now. The last time Fozzie and friends had their own show was 2015's misjudged mockumentary sitcom. Perhaps in an attempt to prevent a similar flop, Now takes the property back to basics, which produces mixed results.

Muppets Now is a half-hour show made up of semi-unscripted skits, including Miss Piggy's beauty vlog series Lifesty(le), the Swedish Chef's cook-off, and Dr Bunsen and Beaker's science lessons. As always, the puppet performers are joined by a host of celebrity guests - RuPaul, Linda Cardellini, and Danny Trejo feature in early episodes - and there's a wraparound narrative each week as Scooter attempts to edit and upload the show from home.

As the title suggests, Muppets Now is very keen (maybe even overzealous) to make sure Jim Henson's timeless creations are relevant to today's audiences. The unscripted nature of the show does make for a lot of fun moments, particularly when the celebs get involved, but it also means it can be hit and miss. All in all, it's a diverting way to spend 25 minutes, like the YouTube-style content it evokes, but it's maybe not the grand return to form that Muppet diehards will be hoping for.

CHRISTIAN BONE

✦✦✦✧✧

DOOM PATROL

REVIEWED: SEASON 2

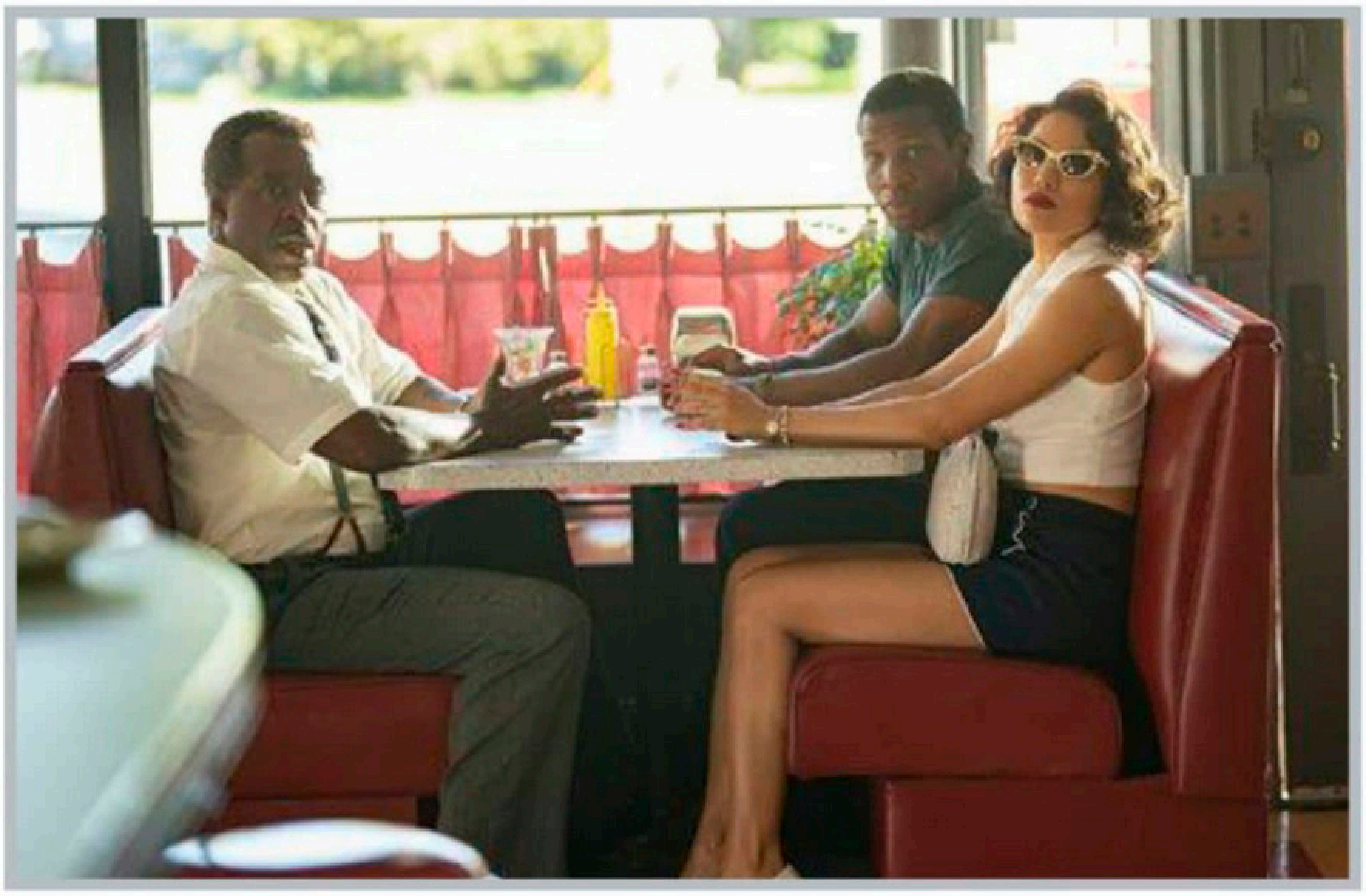
STARZPLAY

Back in the 1980s, there was a trend for taking mostly-forgotten comic book characters and squeezing them into different genres. Doom Patrol started out as a 'superhero misfits' book and got transformed into absurdist horror, blending superhero clichés with weird but chilling ideas, and it's been like that ever since. The first season of the TV show did a very good job of balancing the surreal humour and grim horror of the source material and concluded in a very solid way. The question is, can the new season continue to wow audiences now that they know what to expect? The answer is yes, though Season 2 has a distinctly darker tone. The main dynamic of the show hasn't changed; this is not a superhero team, more a loose collection of strange monsters who hang out together and occasionally foil bizarre creatures and villains. The focus is still on the individual journeys of the heroes. Larry (an immortal radioactive man in bandages) is still coming to terms with his past, the amazingly elastic Rita is working through her issues, and Cliff is still an awful person trapped in a robot body. Brendan Fraser seems to be having a blast as Robotman and does an incredible job with a role that has limited facial expressions. Joivan Wade steals the show this season as Vic Stone, AKA Cyborg. Despite having the most vanilla character, he's magnetic and engaging throughout.

Season 2's main arc storyline is extremely creepy and very well done, evoking multiple horror tropes and ditching much of the fourth-wall-breaking wackiness of Season 1. Spooky weird fun, we hope it gets renewed for a third season.

ED FORTUNE

✦✦✦✦✦



LOVECRAFT COUNTRY

REVIEWED: SEASON 1 (EPISODES 1-5)

NOW TV sky atlantic

Based on Matt Ruff's novel of the same name, the Misha Green and Jordan Peele-developed Lovecraft Country centres around Jonathan Majors' Atticus Black on a journey across the oft-racist corners of 1950s American as he looks to find his missing father. But racism isn't the only monster lurking around the corner for Atticus, his Uncle George (Courtney B. Vance), and friend Leti (Jurnee Smollett-Bell), for there are plentiful Lovecraftian beasts similarly waiting to rear their heads.

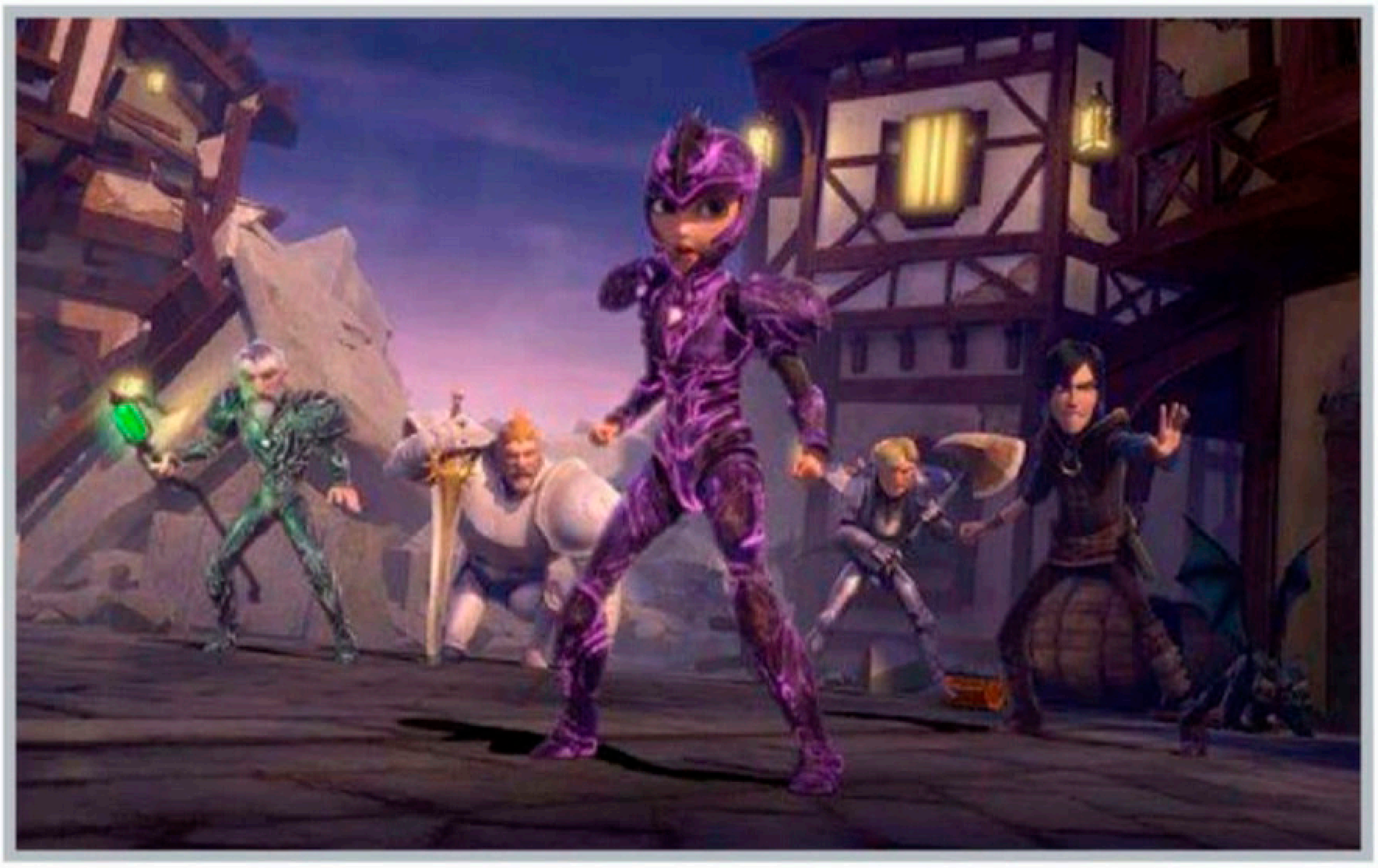
To put it mildly, Lovecraft Country is extremely worthy of the hype that preceded it. While the presence of some stunning Lovecraft-inspired creatures is a main selling point, there is so much more going on here. From top to bottom, Lovecraft Country has a phenomenal ensemble cast, but special praise has to go to leads Jonathan Majors and Jurnee Smollett-Bell. Messrs Majors and Smollet-Bell are a powerhouse duo who anchor the series in the most masterful of ways.

One other notable element of delight from the show is the sheer scope of what it sets out to cover. Terrifying monsters, age-old cults, supernatural chicanery, action-adventure quests and more, this is a series that so often varies from episode-to-episode – yet all while pushing forward with a continuing narrative, and with heinous acts of racism forever present.

Given the very real horrors of the world that have once more shown themselves to be tragically still present here in 2020, Lovecraft Country feels extremely timely – and there's enough evidence here to show that its inaugural season could be a truly special piece of television.

ANDREW POLLARD

✦✦✦✦✦



WIZARDS: TALES OF ARCADIA

REVIEWED: SEASON 1

NETFLIX

The Guillermo del Toro-helmed Tales of Arcadia has been a delight. So far the series has had both fantasy and sci-fi elements, with Trollhunters dealing with the 'supernatural monsters and magic' side of things and 3Below focusing on the more sci-fi elements of the world. Thus far, it's been quite a wild ride.

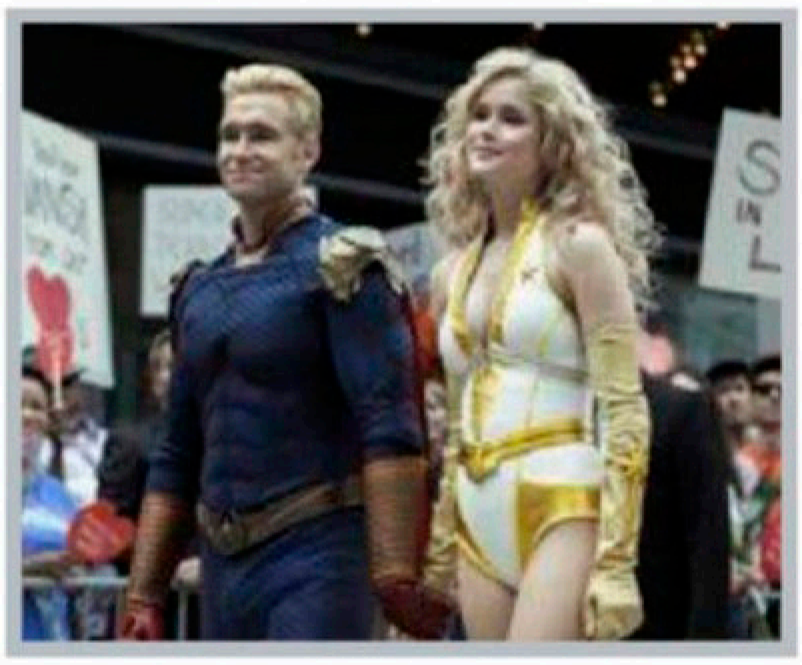
Wizards introduces us to a new character, Douxie, Merlin's apprentice. He's been living in Arcadia for a long time, fending off evil forces and keeping a low-profile. Merlin calls and Douxie comes running, along with his wise-cracking dragon/cat familiar. The show pretty much picks up straight after the events of 3Below and mostly ignores all of that to tell a new tale.

Alas, the storytelling feels a little compressed; characters are introduced a little too rapidly for the audience to buy in quickly and established heroes are either put on pause or sidelined. The plot tries to both introduce an entirely new element to the Tales of Arcadia canon while also integrating everything with the established setting. The result is a noisy mess in places and a feeling that more time should have been spent on just letting this rich and complicated world breathe.

The show is so busy charging into the big moments that all subtlety is lost, replaced with a frantic game of 'join the dots' with the other shows. Wizards: Tales of Arcadia is a fun series with some great moments, but feels more like an appendix to previous shows, which is a pity because had they given it more time it really could have been the best of series so far.

ED FORTUNE

✦✦✦



THE BOYS

REVIEWED: SEASON 2

prime video

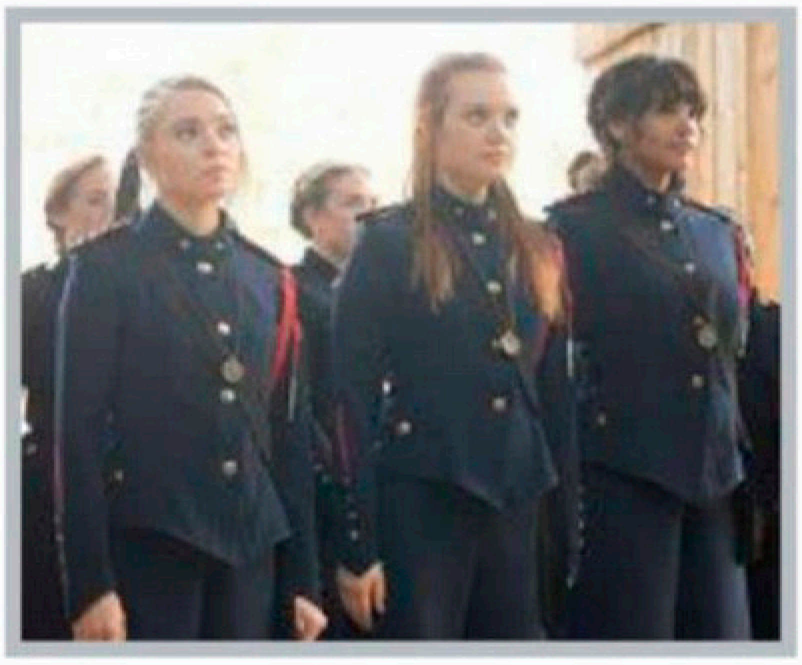
The Garth Ennis-penned comic book The Boys started out as a subversion of superhero story tropes, exposing the four-colour world of capes and villains to the grim realities of capitalism and fame. The heroes were self-serving monsters and it was up to a rag-tag special unit of thugs called 'the Boys' to keep them in line. Season 1of the TV show took the basic premise and characters and made something more interesting, replacing Ennis' polemic on the comic book industry with an actual plot.

Season 2 improves on the previous, with The Boys on the run from pretty much everyone and beginning to fall out with each other. Beloved superhero team The Seven tighten their grip on America as their influence and control continues to expand, with Antony Starr continuing to nail it as the insane super-man, Homelander. The series also introduces a new 'hero' in the form of the extremely unsubtle Storm Front, played by Arya Cash. Despite the obvious evil overtones, Cash makes her character more likeable than she has any right to be, making some of the show's darker moments all the more engaging.

Though Karl Urban scowls his way through another role as a stereotypical tough guy, it's Jack Quaid and Erin Moriarty who steal the show as Hughie and Annie. The dynamic of 'lost but still fighting' hammers much of the show's pathos home. Season 2 is far more confident in both its tone and level of spectacle, with thrilling fight scenes and appropriately stunning special effects.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★☆



FORT SALEM

REVIEWED: SEASON 1

BBC iPlayer

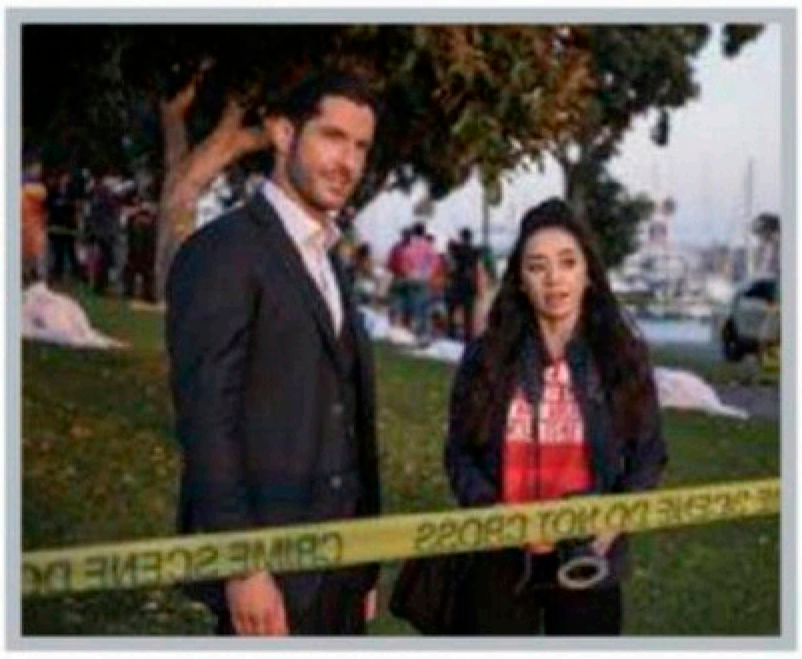
In a dystopian, nationalist present, witches have struck a deal to fight as an all-female branch of the American military. The series focuses on three new recruits - Raelle, Tally, and Abigail - as they train hard to one day fight a mysterious terrorist group known as the Spree, whose favoured method is making hoards of people think they're extras in The Happening.

American imperialism floats and flies over the show like a banshee, and the compelling premise of a matriarchal, staunchly patriotic society where witches coexist is enough to hook your interest. What Fort Salem can't quite do is sustain it. Creator Eliot Laurence has more than a skeleton of a fascinating idea, but much-needed detail, and at times purpose, go amiss in a way that prevents you from really sinking into this alternate world. The Handmaid's Tale this is not. The cast, however, are all exceptional, as is Laurence's beautiful eye for presentation which fleetingly raises its head in spectacular ways. Taylor Hickson is fantastic, raising Raelle to be more than a run-of-the-mill rebellious character.

It is strange that a near all-female story with obvious aims to be empowering features a number of established male creators behind the camera (not least Will Ferrell and Adam McKay). Whether connected to this or not, some of the twists feel a touch predictable. All the ingredients are there, but more inventiveness is needed to make Fort Salem linger in the memory. There is great potential for the show if Season 2 is injected with more depth and risk.

JAMES HANTON

★★★☆☆



LUCIFER

REVIEWED: SEASON 5 (PART 1)

NETFLIX

Moving to Netflix remains the best thing that ever happened to *Lucifer*. Now, let's be clear: *Lucifer* is not a good show. What it is, though, is fun. The premise is ridiculous, the acting is (mostly) so bad it's good, everyone is incredibly attractive and, best of all, it doesn't take itself too seriously. Yet despite all that, Season 5 still stagnates.

Hence why the show being rehomed to Netflix was perfect. Ideal for binge-watching while browsing the ASOS sale on your phone, one can allow themselves to succumb to Tom Ellis' devilish charm and emerge two days later with only a hazy memory of what unfolded over those eight episodes. Meanwhile, the showrunners' insistence that *Lucifer* stick to its procedural structure continues to weight it down. With every hour that ticks by, Lucifer uses yet another dull, forgettable case to work through his personal issues. The show has always been at its best when focusing on its main characters' relationships and personal conflicts. And yet, aside from Lesley Ann-Brandt's solid performance as Maze, Season 5 lacks even that – which is impressive considering Lucifer's evil twin brother gets thrown into the mix.

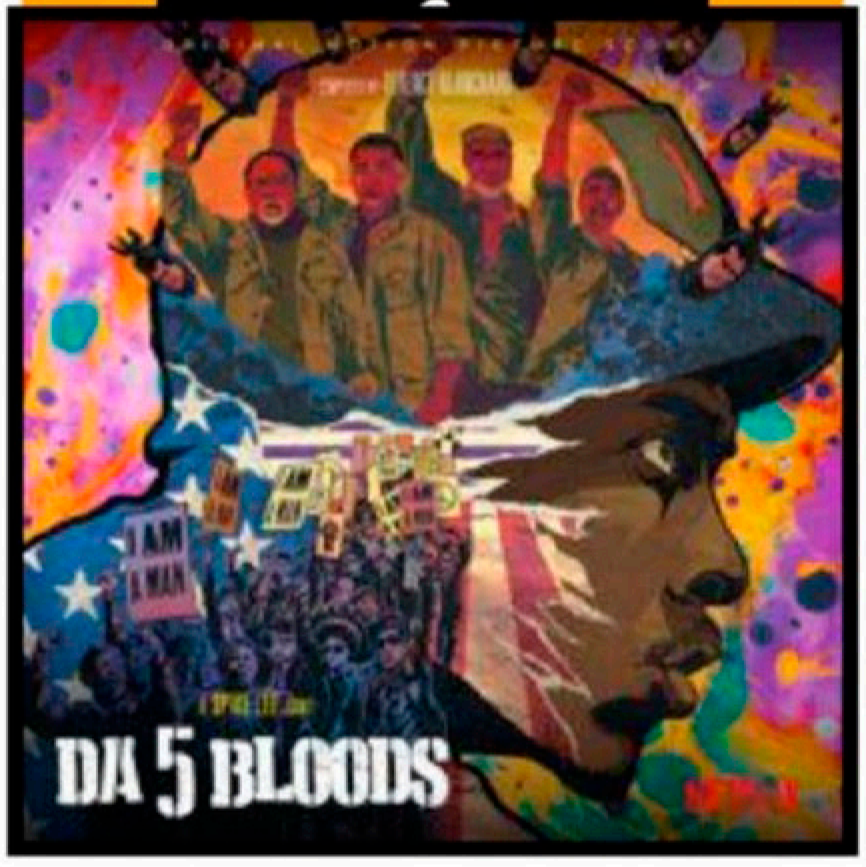
Every character appears stuck in their own Hell loop: Lucifer is terrified of intimacy and keeps mishandling every relationship; Chloe continues to receive zero character development; Ella's love life is comically awful; Amenadiel worries; Linda gives advice then gets ignored; Dan is the butt of the joke. Did we just describe every season so far? *Lucifer* has its funny moments, but Season 5 could absolutely have used a few more. Maybe God can keep Part 2 from dragging.

LAURA POTIER

★★☆☆☆

THE STARBURST GUIDE TO THE SOUNDTRACK SCENE

BY NICK SPACEK



Because of COVID-19 concerns, this year's San Diego Comic-Con was conducted virtually. Rebranded as Comic-Con@Home, the event saw all panels take place virtually, playing out across various platforms, but mainly via YouTube livestreams. While this was a big downer for many people looking to make their annual trek out to California, for those of us who've always been unable to make it through the ticket lottery and/or find lodging during the event, it presented a unique opportunity to see these events unfold as everyone else did, rather than via second-hand recollections and shaky mobile videos.

For the purposes of our interests, we're going to focus on the big Art of Soundtracks panel presented by Mondo. In addition to announcements of Mondo and Death Waltz Recording Co. releases from Mo Shafeek and Spencer Hickman, the panel also featured representatives from Enjoy the Ride, Milan Records, Invada, Tiger Lab Vinyl, Terror Vision, and Ship to Shore Phono Co. There was a lot announced during the hour-plus panel, so let's get to it.

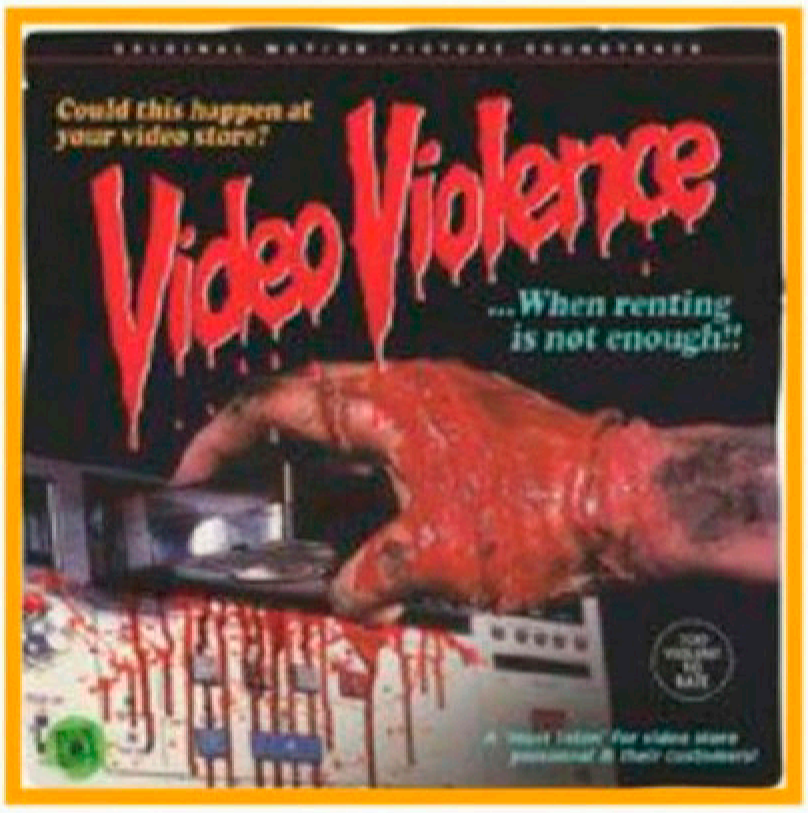
Before their big announcements at the end of the panel, Shafeek mentioned that 2021 will see Mondo bring out the music for both **Silent Hill 3** and **4**, making the wait for the next two instalments a little less than what we had between the original and **Silent Hill 2**, which was nearly three years. He also promised that the long-gestating soundtrack to beloved rock 'n' roll comedy **That Thing You Do** will be out this year, after having been first announced back in April during a reunion of the actors from the film.

In the first batch of announcements, Milan's J.C. Chamboredon dropped a massive list of what the label will be releasing, which really ran the gamut in terms of film genre and musical styles. First up is a double gatefold LP release of the score to Spike Lee's recent Netflix film **Da 5 Bloods**, composed by Terence Blanchard, which will be out this autumn. Also out this autumn - specifically, October 23rd - is Yuki Hayashi's score for **My Hero Academia: The Movie - Heroes Rising**. This marks the first-ever **My Hero Academia** music ever officially on vinyl, and given the sheer crazy fandom behind it, should be a massive success. Judging by how much my Facebook feed exploded when the game released last month, an even bigger success will be the triple LP release of Ilan Eshkeri and Shigeru 'Ume' Umebayashi's score for the PlayStation 4 samurai action-adventure game **Ghost of Tsushima**. Much like the game itself, the score is absolutely massive - hence, the two composers - and one wonders just how much music is going to be left on the cutting room floor. That will also be out by autumn, and Chamboredon emailed me to let me know that while it didn't make the panel announcements, the label is also putting out the vinyl to Netflix series **White Lines** this fall, with music by Tom Holkenborg, aka Junkie XL. The biggest news of the whole event was likely the fact that Milan is bringing the classic, absolutely untouchable score for the anime series **Cowboy Bebop** to vinyl. It's not out until November 6th, but the music by Yoko Kanno and Seatbelts did happen to appear on Spotify just a little bit earlier than Chamboredon's announcement, so feel free to stream until you can drop actual money.

ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK
THE SHED
HORROR IN STEREO
MUSIC BY SAM EWING
PRODUCED BY BEAR MCCREARY

Speaking of anime, the list from Tiger Lab Vinyl is massive. The label's Jon Dobyns announced Tiger Lab's upcoming subscription series, which will include the following (deep breath, kids): **3x3 Eyes: Legend of the Divine Demon**, a **HunterxHunter** 3xLP set, which features 75 tracks curated by two diehard fans of the series, **Devilman: Demon Bird**, a **Hellsing** four-LP box set, and a double LP of **Tokyo Godfathers**. That's crazy, right? Classic series and films, as well as one of the hottest series currently going. There's nothing more they could possibly offer. Incorrect! There will be a **Death Note** Deluxe six-LP box set, as well as a Halloween release of the score to the original 1985 **Vampire Hunter D** film.

THE MOVIE
HEROES RISING
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK


ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK
Could this happen at your video store?
Video Violence
...When renting is not enough!!

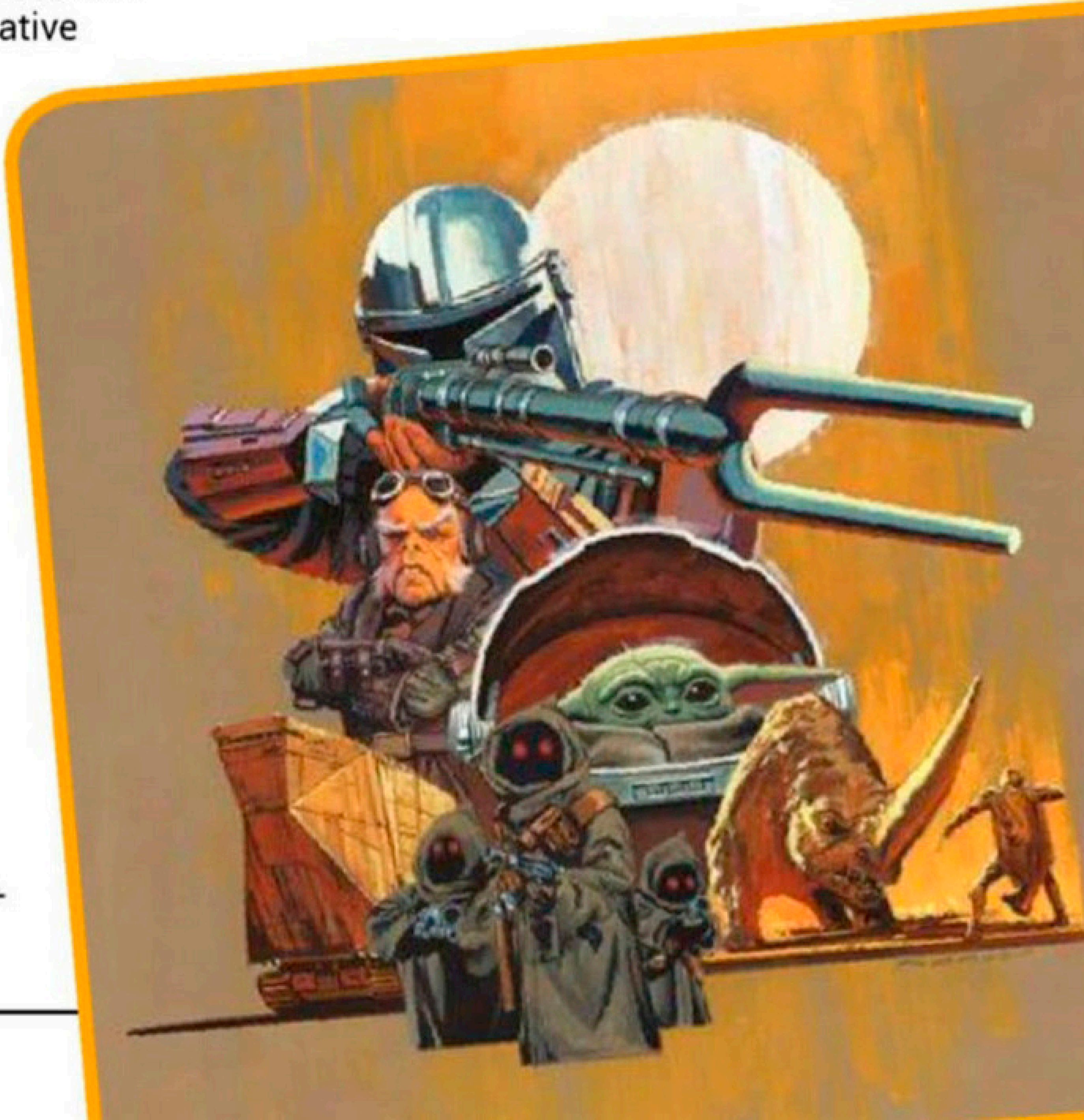
Crazily enough, it doesn't end there. Tiger Lab might be known for releasing anime scores and soundtracks on vinyl, but the label will be premiering a new subsidiary, as yet unnamed, to focus on '80s and '90s martial arts films. The first title on the docket is Paul Hertzog's score for the 1989 Jean-Claude Van Damme film **Kickboxer**. Sadly, the soundtrack will not include the pop songs written and performed by Stan Bush, but given the sheer quality of the Perseverance Records compact disc a few years back, the track listing is sure to get your blood pumping.

Ship to Shore Phono Co. dropped a slew of titles, many of which are recent releases on streaming service Shudder, including the score to their **Cursed Films** documentary series. Also on deck are **The Head Hunter**, **Swallow**, **The Wretched**, and **Attack of the Demons**. I highly recommend **The Wretched**. Although the film is - as my wife described it - "*One Crazy Summer in Candle Cove*" it's a fun flick, and the music by Devin Burrows is straight-up horror synths and really worth checking out. Ship to Shore also debuted the first two titles in their new Video Audio System - aka VAS - cassette line of scores. The VAS releases come with a download of the film via a code. The transfers are the same as the ones that Vinegar Syndrome and Synapse have used for their respective releases. Announced via the stream were **Demon Wind**, with music by Bruce Wallenstein and **Blood Harvest**, with music by George Daughtrey and Tiny Tim. Joe Renzetti's music for **Frankenhooker** will also be part of the line, but the label didn't announce it at the time because the artwork wasn't finished, although the label did release it as a split LP with the music for **Basket Case 2** a few years back. All three cassettes will be released on Black Friday.

Enjoy the Ride Records announced just one release, the Ren & Stimpy compilation, **You Eediot!**, which will be making its vinyl debut. The label's Ross Shotland clarified a few details for us, such as the fact that the single LP release will have all new artwork, with a four-page sing-along lyric sheet booklet, so you can shout along to *Happy Happy Joy Joy*, *Log*, and more. It will come in various themed colour variants, as per most of the label's releases, including a very limited Gritty Kitty 'Kitty Litter Filled' variant available through their website. Not announced during the Art of Soundtracks panel, but on the way is a 12-inch vinyl edition of the **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**' *Let's Kick Shell!*, originally put out by ETR in 2016. This will also have brand-new artwork, including a flip-open sewer cap cover and a screen printed B-side. More sing-along fun there, am I right? Also coming from Enjoy the Ride is a repress of their **Hey Arnold! The Music Vol 1** - which sold out in less than an hour when originally released in July - in new limited-edition themed colour variants. The last thing that they are releasing is the soundtrack to indie-horror film **The Shed**, which we reviewed a few issues back. While the film is fine, the score is fantastic, composed by Sam Ewing and Bear McCreary. Ewing's work on the likes of **Happy Death Day**, **Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.**, **The Walking Dead**, the Hulu **Into the Dark** film, **Pooka!**, and more really see him stepping out to create innovative music, and it's great to see him starting to get more solo work.

Terror Vision's Ryan Graveface announced two releases and they are spectacular. First was the score to the 1987 shot-on-video shocker **Video Violence**. Most folks have had a pretty good idea that this was coming, thanks to some hints Ryan had been dropping on social media, but the official announcement was great to hear, nonetheless. Gordon Ovsiew's score is exactly perfect for the label's super-limited, never-to-be-repressed VHS line, and it has already sold out. Also sure to be a smash success is the never-before-released in any format score for **The Gate**, also released in 1987. One of my absolute favorite horror films of all time, the film's score is Michael Hoenig and J. Peter Robinson, who were also responsible for the killer car reincarnation movie **The Wraith**. You really have to see it to believe it. Still - **The Gate**! Goblins, melting skulls, and dead bodies behind the drywall, to say nothing of fighting the devil with a model rocket. It's everything your 11-year-old heart desires.

Finally, Mondo offered up two final releases, and they're really, really big deal things. First is Daft Punk's **Tron: Legacy** score, in a tenth anniversary edition. No details, but given that the original pressing is absurdly expensive, expect this one to only be more popular, given the way in which its stature has risen in the last decade. Now, this last announcement is going to be popular, but my opinion on it likely won't be. Ludwig Göransson's score for Disney+'s **The Mandalorian** is getting an eight-LP boxset with individual art for each episode, out sometime after November.



STAR WARS
DOCTOR APHRA
SARAH KUHN
NARRATED BY A FULL CAST

PUBLISHER: PENGUIN AUDIO
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The second original Star Wars drama released by Penguin Audio throws us inside the life of Doctor Chelli Lona Aphra, the rogue archaeologist who is equal parts Harley Quinn and Indiana Jones. Told from her own unique point of view, Aphra is always on the lookout for the angle, whether it be in her dealings with her employer Darth Vader (keen to redeem himself after the Death Star's destruction), his master Emperor Palpatine, rebels Han Solo and Leia Organa, or her sometime associate, the towering Wookiee Black Krrsantan. We may only hear the story from her point of view, so tales of her heroism are assured, but there's no doubt that Aphra is a survivor and a smart one at that.

Flashbacks to her university years reveal a wasted career in academia and a simmering romance with fellow student Sana Starros, who she later reunites with as her misadventures continue. Her childhood is also investigated and sees a young Chelli travelling the galaxy with her father who is keen to stretch her inquisitive mind, and a cautious mother who she loses in tragic circumstances. Aphra may be a sarcastic, often-frustrating character, but her past was forged in tragedy and loss, like so many notable Star Wars characters.

Emily Woo Zeller leads the show as Doctor Aphra with a pitch-perfect performance, spinning us from future to past in a retelling of the early issues of the first Darth Vader series from Marvel. With so much ground to cover, writer Sarah Kuhn does a stellar job of compiling all of these plot threads, bringing them together into a cohesive whole as we learn more and more about the good doctor. A braggart with a callous streak she may be, but pick away at the façade and you find there's a more sympathetic character than first appearances might present.

Audiobook legend Marc Thompson is Darth Vader, in a performance not imitating James Earl Jones, but instead channeling the dark lord's spirit, much like Brock Peters' performance did in the radio plays. Sean Kenin as homicidal droid Triple-Zero is a treat, delivering a performance that evokes The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, while Nicole Lewis nails it as Sana Starros. The attraction between Starros and Aphra may come off like your granny's favourite romance novel, but the attraction between the characters is clear, and Aphra's need and desire for someone to share her adventures fizzes off the page. She may like to give off the impression that she's a loner, but she's fooling no one.

At under six hours, Doctor Aphra is shorter than your regular unabridged book, but that doesn't harm this tale at all. We're given a bright and breezy tour through the life and schooling of the character, perfectly timed as the second volume of her Marvel comic launches, to accompany Hasbro figures, Gentle Giant busts, and other media. And yes, a sequel story is very much desired.

MARK NEWBOLD

★★★★★

GHOSTBUSTERS
THE ORIGINAL NOVELIZATIONS OF GHOSTBUSTERS 1 AND 2
ONLY FROM audible

PUBLISHER: AUDIBLE
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

At approaching forty years old, Ghostbusters is quite rightly considered a classic (its sequel, equally justifiably, not so much), and if you ever wondered what they would be like as audio fiction, the answer is... very, very average.

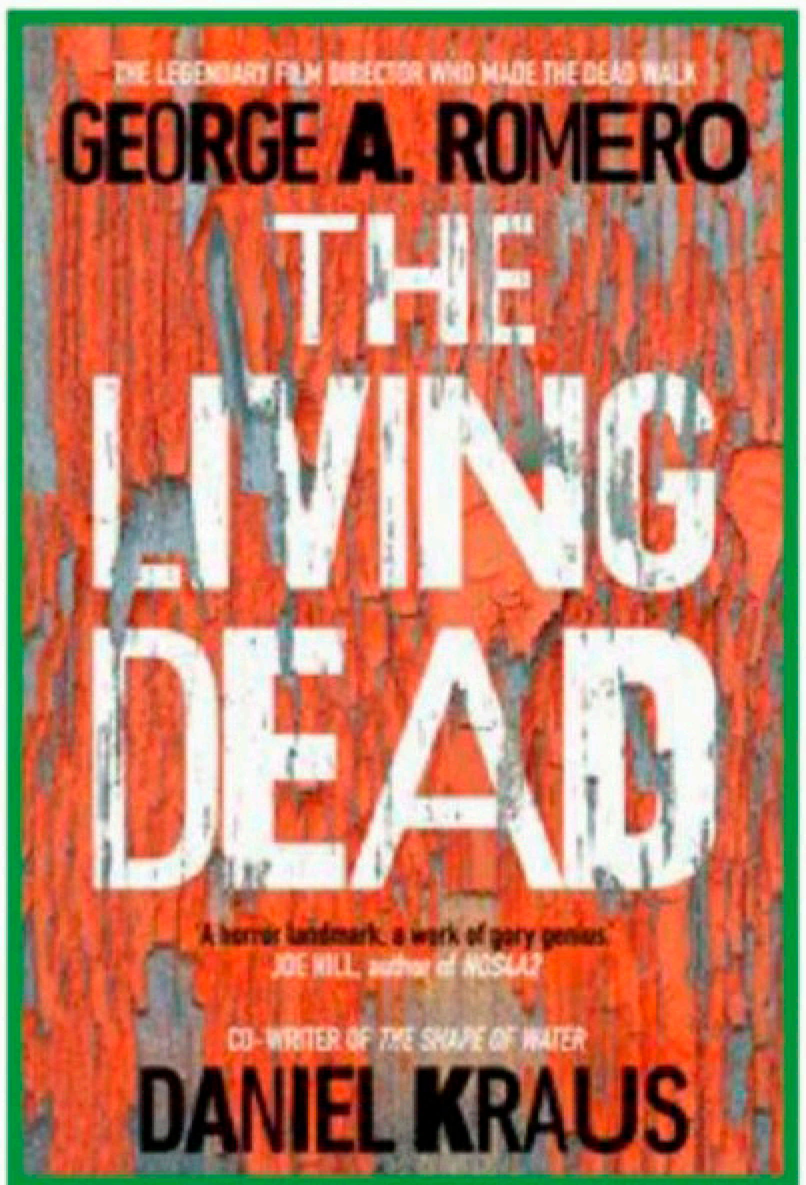
Audiobooks are often augmented in quality by how well the narrator brings the characters to life, both in terms of acting as them and affording them a distinctive voice. While you can't expect every performer to do as spectacular a job in each aspect as, say, James Marsters does with The Dresden Files or Rupert Degas for Skulduggery Pleasant, at the very least the intonation should have some distinction between individuals. However, Johnny Heller's often generic reading has the nebbish neuroses of Rick Moranis' Louis as the only character whose speech doesn't need a dialogue tag to let you know who's talking, with most of the others blending into a generic muddle. A further problem with Heller's narration is that while his newsreader-serious voice is perfect for the litany of drama and nonfiction to which he has lent his vocal tones, this interpretation of the material really isn't all that funny despite the movies very much skewing to the humorous side of their comedy-horror genre-blending. Most significantly, Peter being absent of Bill Murray's charm and deadpan delivery causes him to seem more like a selfish pervert than a rakish rogue.

Much of the action is presented too matter-of-factly, failing to adequately relate the spectacle of the visuals. Okay, you'll probably have countless rewatches of the films to fill in the blanks, but a written narrative shouldn't need to rely on prior experience to function as a decent one itself. On a more positive note, the books take the opportunity to expand on the films' brisk pace through the likes of incorporating some past experiences in the friendships of Peter, Ray, and Egon, restoring the original backstory for Winston that the movie excised, or relating what Janine thought about the surreal job she found herself dropped in. They also deftly flesh out several peripheral characters afforded mere minutes of screen time, and while they play no greater part in proceedings, they are more recognisable as genuine people rather than merely being there to serve a function. Also included is a discarded idea of a couple of hobos acting as the story's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, periodically cropping up to be perpetually bemused by what's going on.

Overall, while this audio omnibus of the Ghostbusters novelisations is mildly entertaining, you're probably better off just sticking with the movies.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★☆☆


THE LEGENDARY FILM DIRECTOR WHO MADE THE DEAD WALK
GEORGE A. ROMERO
THE LIVING DEAD
'A horror landmark, a work of gory genius' JOE HILL, author of NOS4A2
CO-WRITER OF THE SHAPE OF WATER
DANIEL KRAUS

FORMAT: HARDCOVER
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

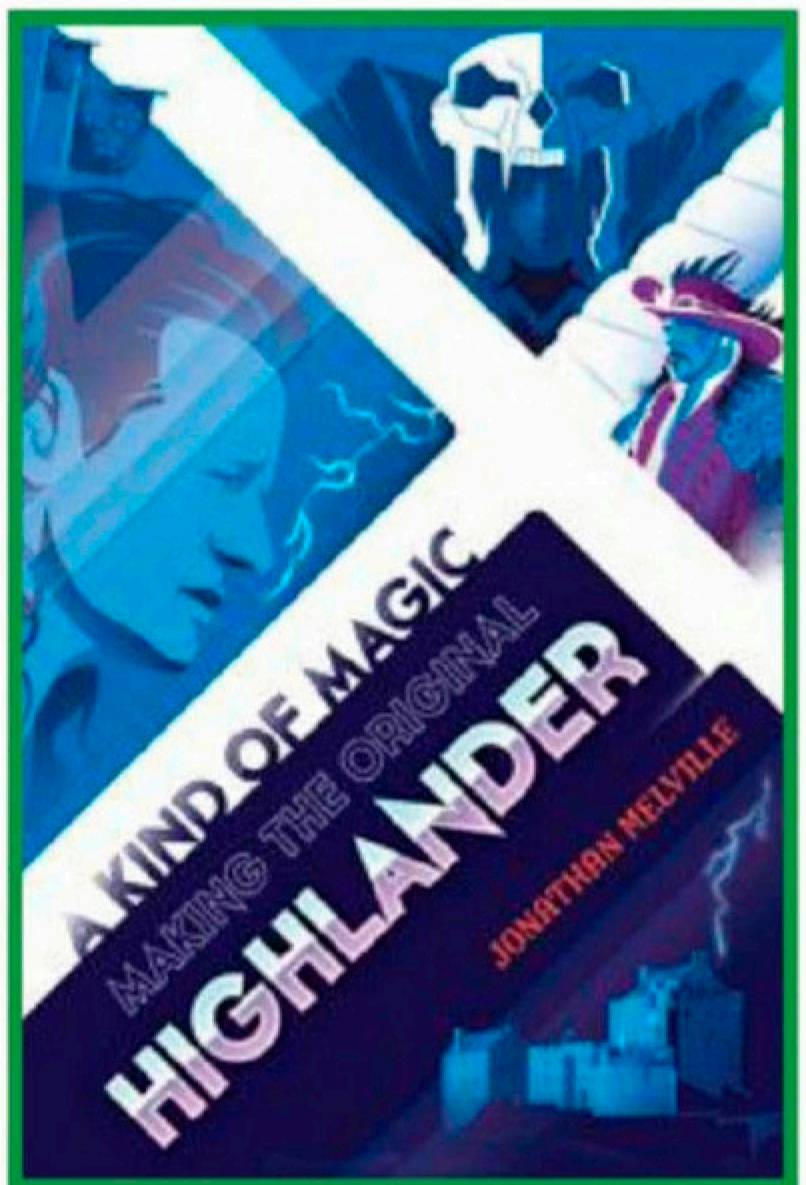
First, came the night. Then, the dawn, day, land, and survival of the dead. Master of horror George A. Romero made many movies, but none had the longevity of his Living Dead films. And the story's not over yet. Enter Romero and Daniel Kraus' The Living Dead, based on resurrected notes, chapter fragments, and plot outlines from Romero's planned epic. Set in present-day America, it updates the movies' continuity while filling in gaps in the timeline – before, during, and after the initial outbreak. This it does with an enormous cast from all walks of life: a phone-obsessed medical examiner, a vain news anchor, sympathetic Navy pilots, a plucky teenage girl, and many more. It's The Stand crossed with World War Z.

Romero's work always came politically and satirically charged, and The Living Dead is no different. Here, consumerist ghouls become social media-obsessed zombies, constantly flipping through apps and staring at computer screens. Too often, however, Kraus confuses simply Naming Things with relevance; social media platforms, celebrities, gender and sexual orientation; there are so many references that the book reads like Ready Player One. While its Trump-esque villain is timelier than ever he feels too reminiscent of Dennis Hopper's Land of the Dead antagonist.

It's well written, gory, and exciting enough in the moment, but it sometimes feels more Fanfiction of the Dead than classic Romero.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★☆☆



FORMAT: HARDCOVER
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

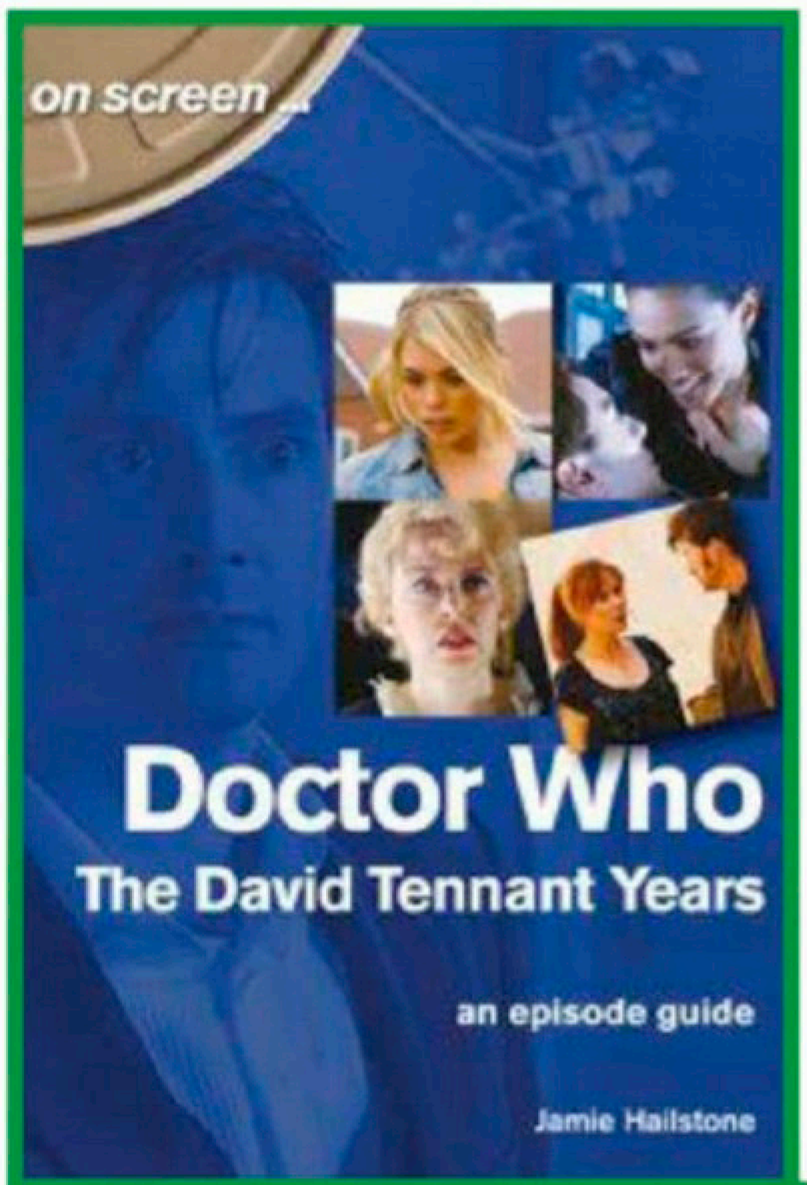
With its original box office failure and its steady stream of dodgy sequels, the first Highlander film has always been a cult hit struggling for mainstream recognition. But, as proven by Jonathan Melville's new book, it's the cult films that have the most interesting stories to tell. As a die-hard Highlander fan, this writer has been waiting for a book like A Kind of Magic for nearly two decades, and it's a delight to finally read it.

This thoroughly researched book takes us through the making of this weird and wonderful film, showing us previously unseen photos and doing a lot to uncover forgotten information and dispel old myths. For example, debunking a trivia titbit some of us have trotted out for years - Sean Connery's echo-filled voiceover was not in fact recorded in his bathroom. I also learned that the widely-ridiculed backflipping in the first scene was actually planned, rather than just improvised on the day as many had assumed. Nuggets of information like this will keep you engrossed throughout, no matter how much you think you know about the film's production.

It's hard to believe that it's taken nearly 35 years for a definitive history to come out, but Melville has written one that every fan should read. The end result is for anybody who thought they knew everything about Highlander. They'll be happy to be proven wrong.

SCOTT VARNHAM

★★★★☆



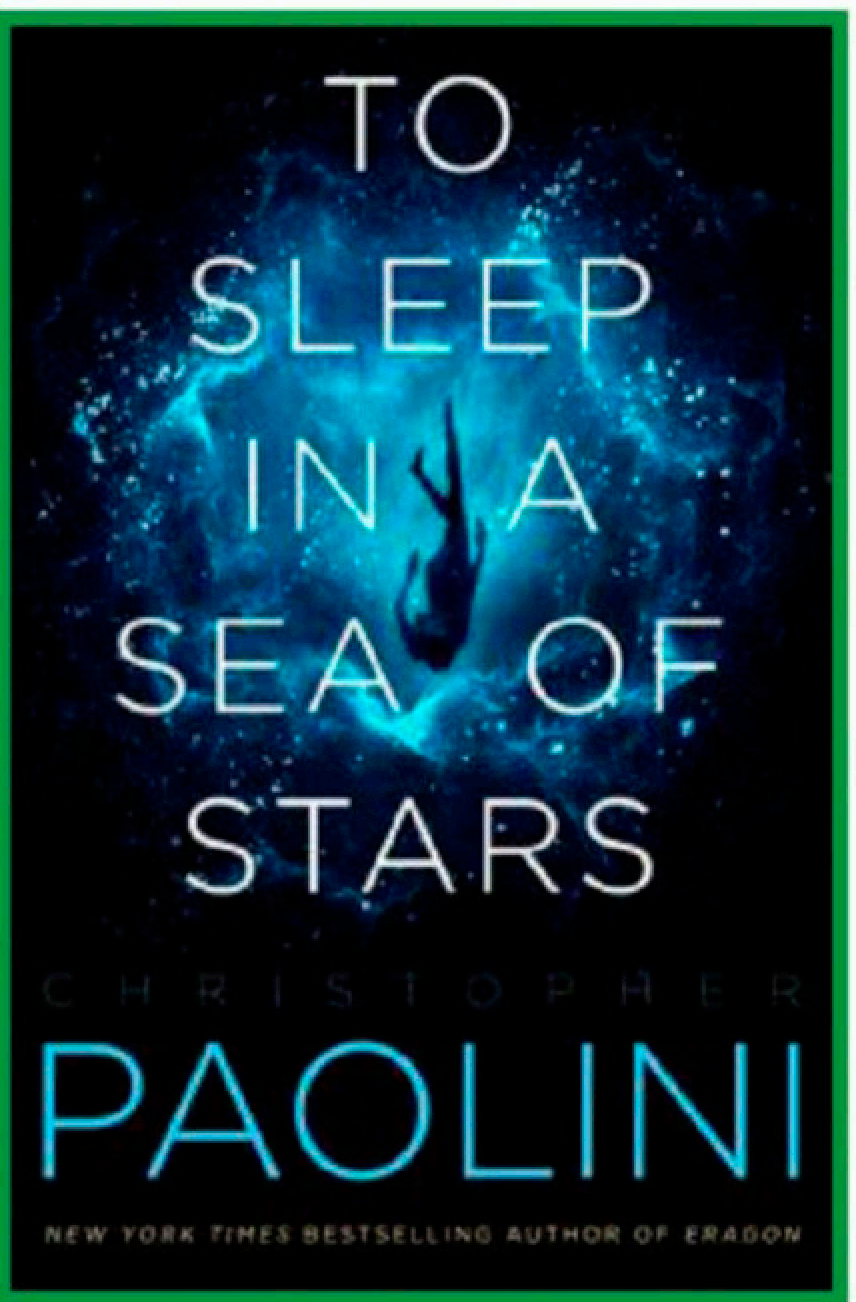
FORMAT: PAPERBACK
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Most Doctor Who fans would surely agree that the David Tennant era of the show represents the imperial phase of its modern incarnation. The lightning-in-a-bottle casting of the charismatic Tennant allied to the electrifying populist showrunning of Russell T Davies turned the series into the biggest thing on British TV for a few years. Doctor Who's extraordinary crossover success during this period has been well-documented over the years and Jamie Hailstone's pocket-sized episode guide, the latest from SonicBond Publishing's On Screen series, while not exactly an essential addition to the Doctor Who library, is a handy reminder of that glorious period when it seemed that everyone in the UK was a fan to some degree.

It's a simple and engaging format. A brief introduction leads us into quick snapshot reviews and story details of each episode with a section devoted to background trivia and ephemera. The author admits that most of his information has been gleaned from the pages of Doctor Who Magazine and the Complete History part-work, so there's nothing new here for the hardcore and opinions are, of course, subjective, so you might find yourself gritting your teeth at some of his reviews. But despite an abundance of sloppy typos and a bit of shonky writing, this is a decent reference guide enlivened by some nice colour photographs from the show and many of its striking Welsh locations.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★☆☆


TO SLEEP IN A SEA OF STARS
CHRISTOPHER PAOLINI
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF ERAGON

FORMAT: HARDCOVER
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Christopher Paolini is best known for the Eragon books, adventure fantasy targeted at the Young Adult audience and notable for being quick and light reads. So it might come as a bit of a surprise that his new book is not only space opera, but it's also epic sci-fi. To Sleep in a Sea of Stars is nearly 900 pages long and firmly aimed at an adult audience. It's also very good.

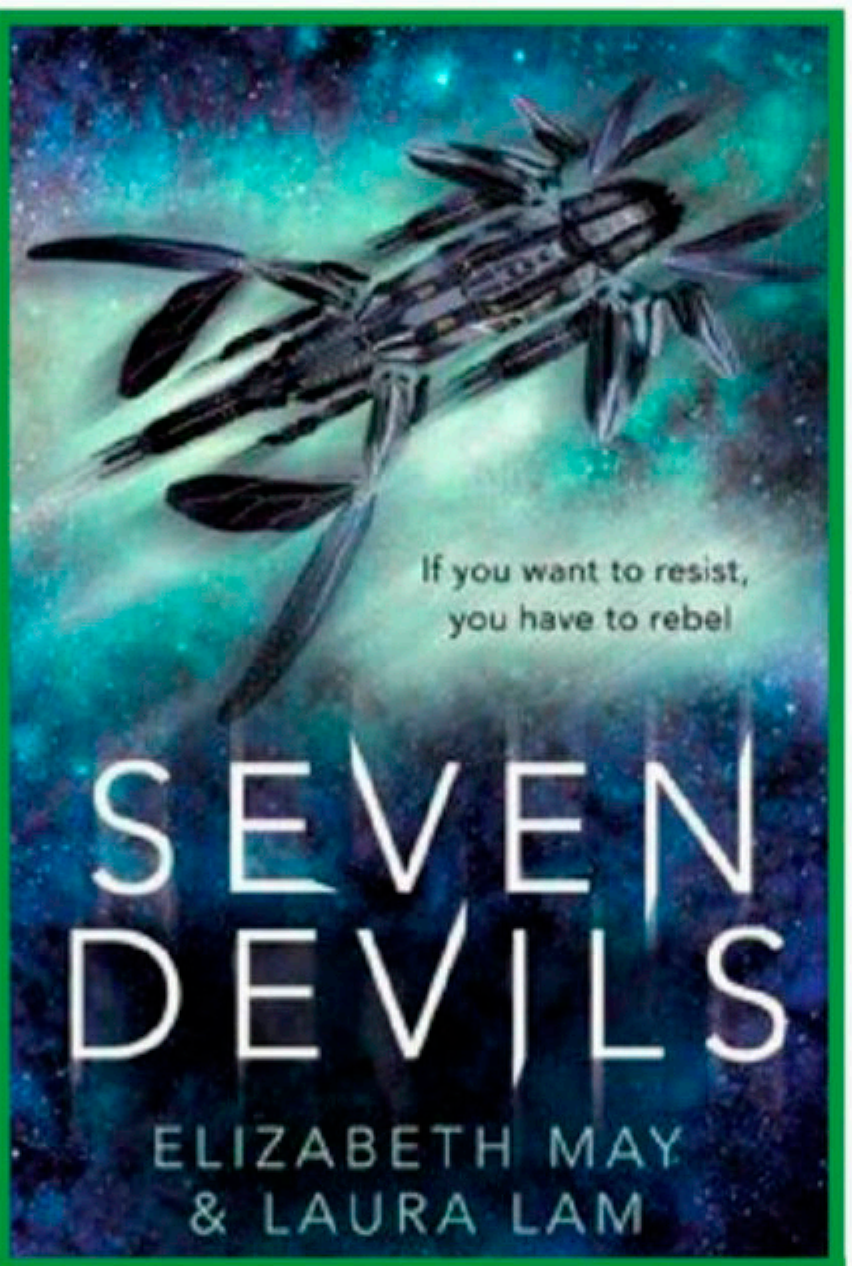
It is a distant future and the story focuses on Kira Navarez, who uncovers a weird alien artefact on a distant world. Humanity makes contact with an alien civilisation and it does not go well for anyone. Going to the stars has not made humanity any kinder or more sympathetic, making for a story that is epic and engaging.

It's an ambitious book. There are a lot of people with their own stories in this tale and an awful lot going on, but it's the plot that drives the story forward, not the character development. This approach makes for epic sci-fi and Paolini excels here; it's an addictive and interesting setting. There's something fascinating on pretty much every page, which means the plot doesn't hang about. The result is something that is multi-layered and very much a page-turner. You keep reading to explore this new world again and again and though the plot is quite deep this style of novel constantly keeps you in the loop. The result is that you find yourself immersed in Paolini's space opera.

Pacing is gentle until it's not; there are plenty of big scenes and lots of build-up to those sequences. It's mostly crunchy science fiction, with enough fact there to keep the reader on board without being a technical manual. This gives it all a cinematic feel and we would be very surprised if some sort of adaptation isn't already planned, the work is begging to be turned into an epic series along the lines of The Expanse. This is Paolini's best book so far, skilfully done, brilliantly imagined and cleverly executed. It's accessible and captivating and left us wanting more.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★


If you want to resist, you have to rebel
SEVEN DEVILS
ELIZABETH MAY & LAURA LAM

FORMAT: HARDCOVER
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In the far future, a disparate assortment of women are thrown together as a resistance movement battles an empire's megalomaniacal expansion across the galaxy, leaving strip-mined planets and genocide in its wake. They each possess particular skills and knowledge essential to their mission, but if they fail, the lives of millions will be forfeit.

Science fiction is often mischaracterised as being little more than the likes of weird aliens, spaceship battles and laser gun duels, and while none of these are in any way bad things, Seven Devils, the initial instalment of a duology of novels, is first and foremost a character piece.

The viewpoint perspective changes almost every chapter, with practically every sentence expanding upon the reader's understanding of she whose thoughts we are currently privy to. Additionally, events frequently jump back in time months and years to provide background information that further augments our understanding of each woman and how the life and trials she overcame shaped her into the person she grew into. Some of them are even positioned to play out like tragedies, previously mentioned details clueing the reader into what happened to the characters involved but helpless to do anything except continue reading as proceedings play out and the doomed stumble towards their inexorable fates.

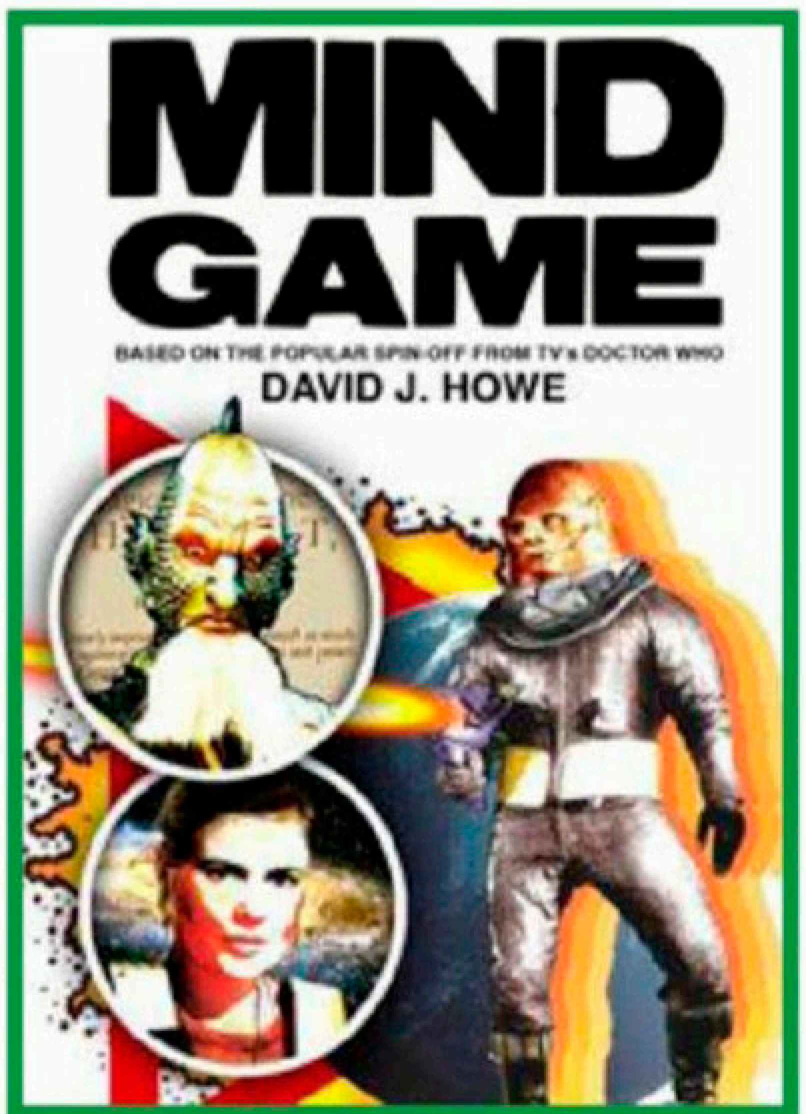
The life each character led – be it engineer, soldier, pilot, courtesan, or even princess – made her a prisoner of the Empire, and it's only through taking charge of her own existence that she has any hope of developing it into something individually meaningful beyond that of an insignificant cog in an insatiable and murderous machine. The core group is also pointedly high in representation, made up of a range of ages, races, queerness, and gender identities.

As for the setting, the naming conventions regularly invoke ancient Greece, with a majority of proper nouns a reference to the civilisation and its mythology. It suggests a homeworld where the culture never fell, but its focus on knowledge and scientific advancement continued to flourish and led to humans leaving their ravaged planet and seeking new homes among the stars. However, along for the ride was the patriarchal misogyny it held up and then thrived under the new interstellar order, with people genetically engineered in batches for a specific use then mentally conditioned to never question instructions, and only a peasant class spared from the mind obfuscation, instead being pacified with drugs to keep them compliant.

Powerfully feminist and meticulously constructed, Seven Devils is a mesmerisingly gripping space opera and a perfect combination of the skills of two talented writers fusing together into a singular distinct voice telling a powerful and compelling tale of courage and fear, loyalty and betrayal, regret and redemption, where a person can remain a glorified slave to a soulless regime, or they can defy their destiny and carve their name in starlight across the heavens.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★☆



FORMAT: PAPERBACK
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Back in the dark days when Doctor Who was distinctly persona non grata at the BBC, enterprising fans kept the flame alive by creating low budget straight-to-video productions featuring more readily licensable supporting characters and monsters, the Doctor himself being understandably off-limits. Veteran fan David J. Howe has taken the bones of the scripts for the 1998 and 1999 productions Mindgame and Mindgame Trilogy and turned them into a slight but rather charming old-school space opera novel hugely evocative of the Target books.

Representatives of three alien species are brought together on a remote asteroid by mysterious aliens from another dimension. They set the three species against one another with the intention of then dominating the race of the survivor which they will then forge into an army to conquer the Galaxy. The three species are all familiar to long-time fans; Sarg is a warlike, glory-seeking Sontaran officer, Eskor is a nobleman of the imperious Draconian race and Star is... well, quite obviously Ace from late 1980s Doctor Who, a sassy mercenary who, we're told, once travelled through Space and Time with a mysterious alien called 'The Professor'. The trio quickly bond into an efficient unit, working together to defeat their captors and find a way back to their own place in space.

Mindgame is a brisk and lively read - Howe has given his characters a more upbeat fate than Mindgame Trilogy - and the result is a bouncy and energetic romp set in one of the more remote corners of the Doctor Who Universe.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★☆

BOOK ›› WORMHOLE

A VINTAGE GENRE PICK FROM KATE FATHERS

If you want an urban fantasy novel that puts fantasy front and centre, then look no further than Emma Bull's 2016 title, War for the Oaks.

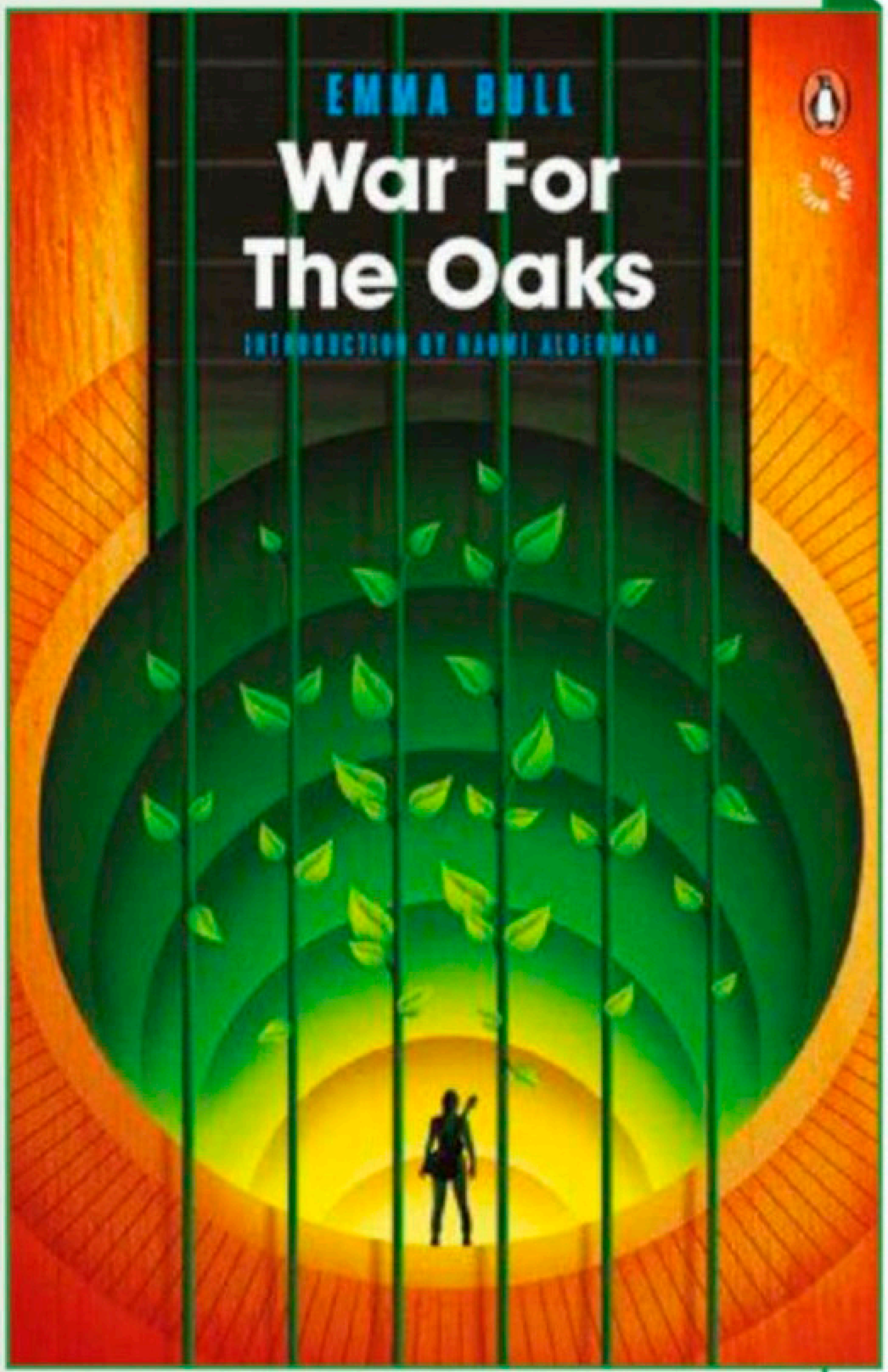
Eddi McCandry is our protagonist: a Minneapolis musician who has just broken up with her boyfriend and her band, and who ends up roped into a war between the Seelie and Unseelie. With her city as the prize, Eddi reluctantly agrees to help and lets the fantastical into her life. It makes her breakfast and puts its feet up on her coffee table. It cleans her apartment. It answers her ads as she builds a new rock band. And it makes her question the way she looks at and understands her world.

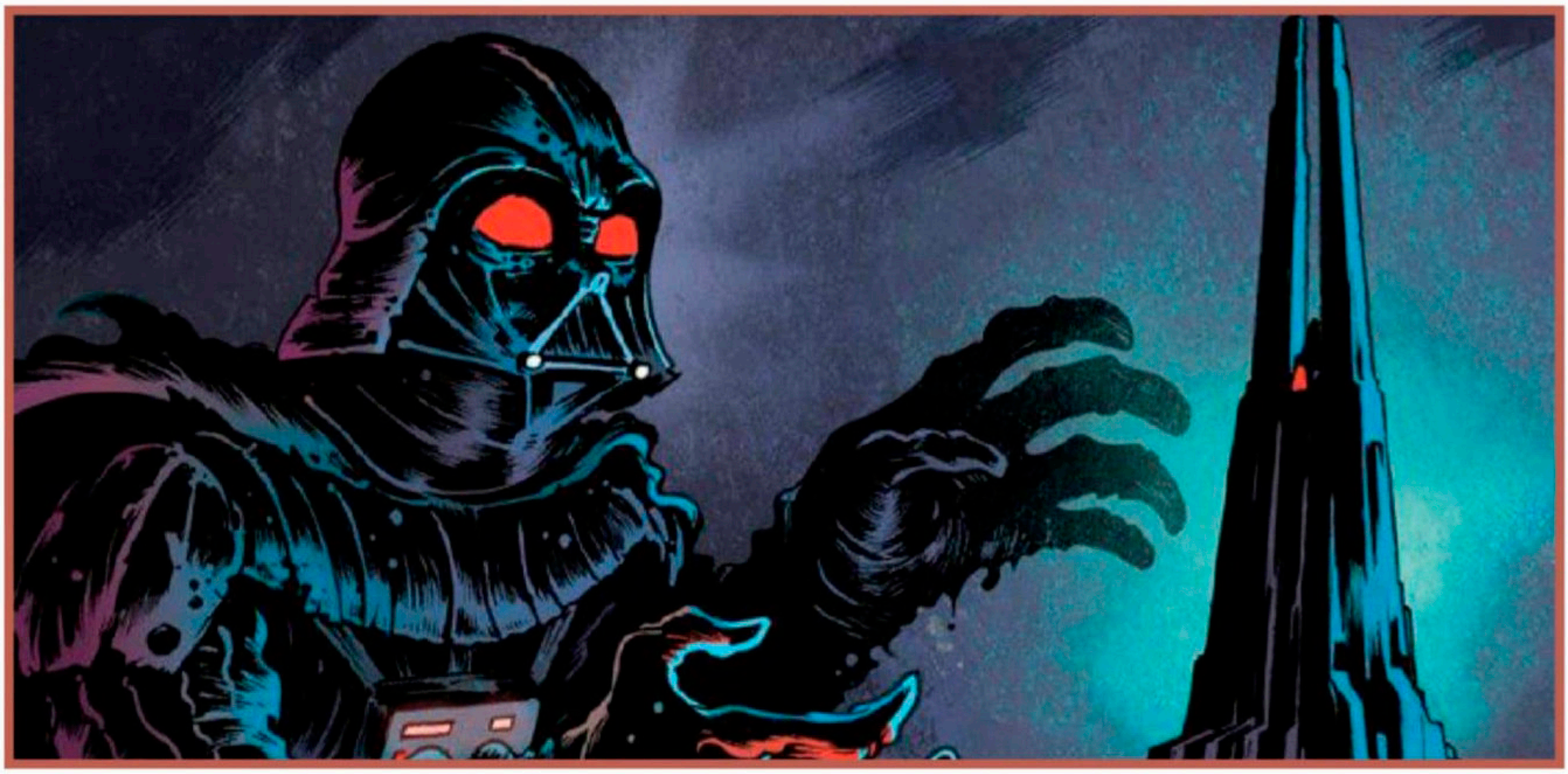
War for the Oaks is both an entertaining story and a keen exploration of its subgenre. Part of the appeal of urban fantasy is the clash between our world and a fantasy one, and Bull doesn't just give us an explosive collision, but the small ways that the human and Fae worlds can butt against each other. Eddi's Phouka bodyguard is allergic to the phrase 'thank you'. Fae can't even tell small lies. Bull picks these quiet differences apart, holds them up to different lights, and helps both the characters and the reader discover a new understanding of their world. And, wonderfully, helps these two species meet in the middle.

When War for the Oaks isn't exploring genre, it's giving us a fast-paced, action-packed story. It's rooted in Minneapolis with loving descriptions, and is full of vivid characters who are constructed out of rock music and snappy dialogue. Music isn't just a throwaway part of Eddi's backstory, but an integral part of the novel, as Eddi is chosen by the Fae because of her affinity for music. Core characters are introduced through the band; Eddi's playing is used to help her make larger connections and resolve conflicts. Incorporating music into a book, particularly song lyrics and performances, can be incredibly difficult, but Bull makes sure that the music breaks don't grind her story to a halt. The lyrics themselves are also poetic and incredibly apt, which you would expect from an author who went on to be in the bands Cats Laughing and The Flash Girls.

But one of the best parts of the novel is the dialogue. Bull doesn't delve too deeply into her characters, eschewing paragraphs of backstory and inner monologues for clever dialogue that slowly reveals her characters' beliefs and personalities. Bull's dialogue is funny and witty, and so unique to each character that you don't even need dialogue tags. It's also successful, particularly with the Phouka, who is so entertaining and so full of personality that you can't help but fall in love with him.

War for the Oaks is Bull's first novel, and although it's imperfect, it's still a creative and exciting read. It takes genre seriously, but also knows when to have fun. It's definitely one that's hard to put down.





STAR WARS: RETURN TO VADER'S CASTLE

FORMAT: TRADE PAPERBACK
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 30TH

Being held in the confines of Vader's Castle can't be much fun, but the team at IDW Comics, led by writer Cavan Scott and a team of artists, appear to be having a grand time as we return to Mustafar for a quintet of creepy tales just in time for Halloween (which is actually celebrated in the Star Wars galaxy, specifically on Endor if you remember your '80s-era Ewoks comics!).

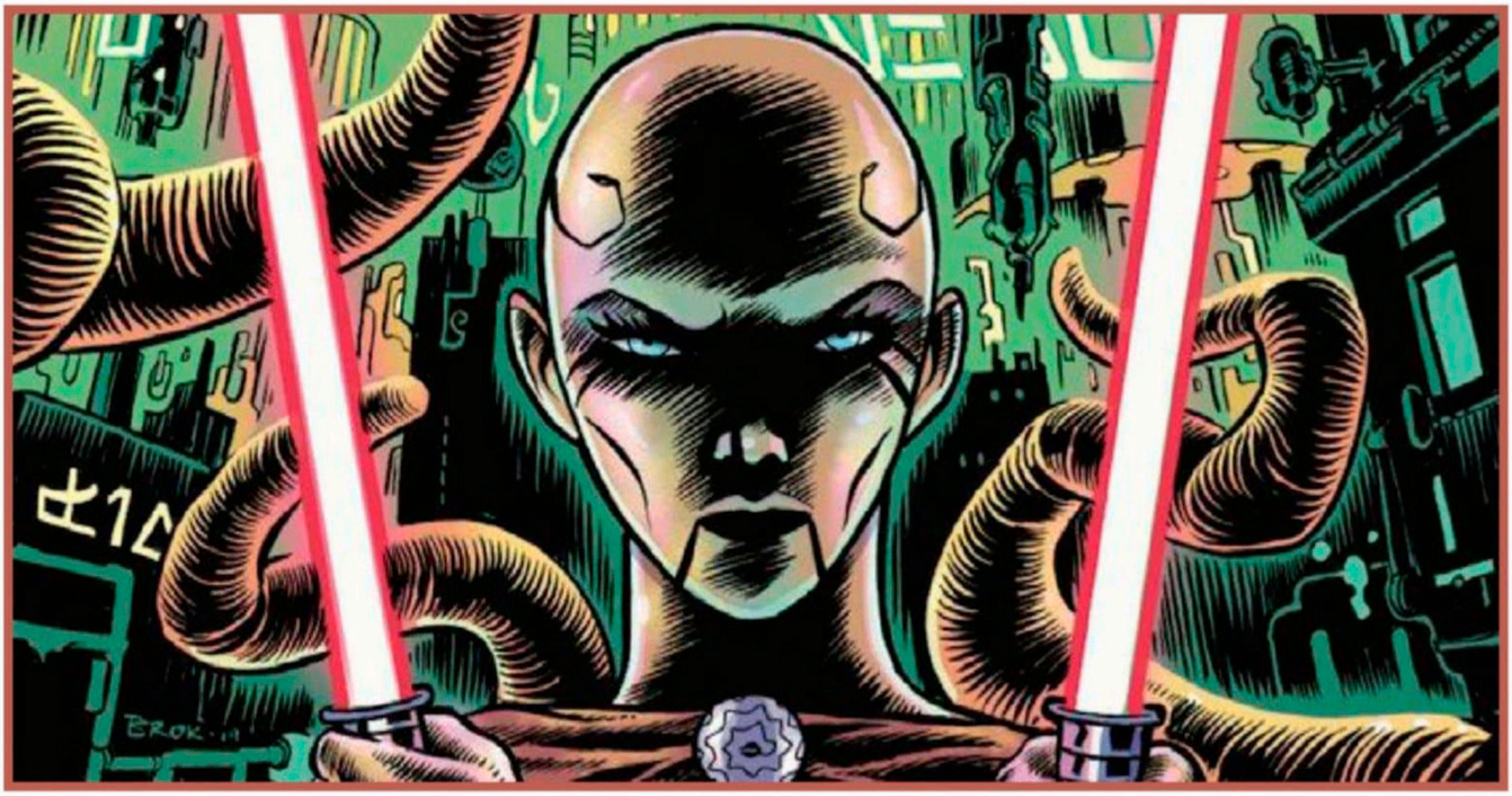
Kicking off with The Horned Devil, we're ignominiously dumped on Lotho Minor, the home of the former Darth Maul – at this point still half man, half spider - as he does his best Pennywise and hunts down a gang of lost children, before The Curse of Tarkin sees a Frankenstein's monster created out of different alien parts return to its 'father' the Grand Moff, wreaking havoc aboard a Star Destroyer before finding some kind of redemption.

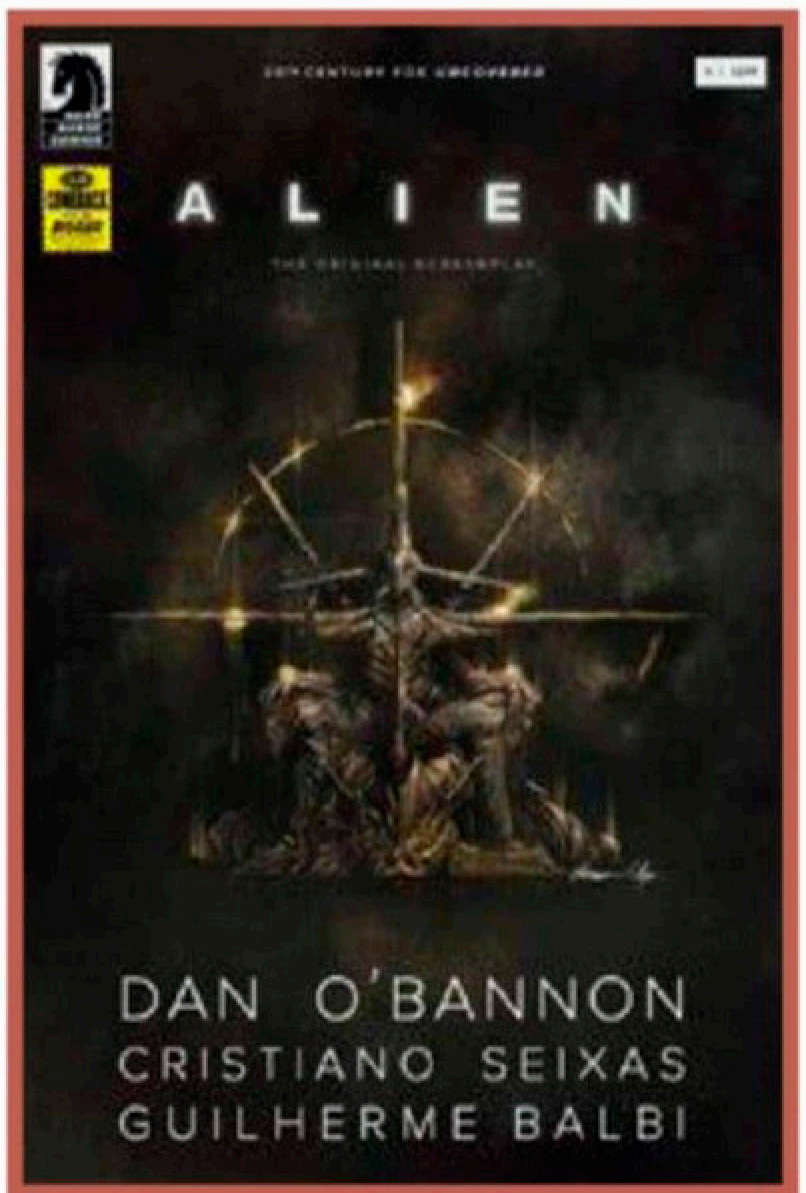
Bop-Sh-bopp, Little Sarlacc Horror brings us the ever-lethal Asajj Ventress on the hunt, finding a pet Sarlacc in a tale drawn by UK artist Nick Brokenshire, while Vault of the Living Brains swings us to Tatooine as Jabba and his cousin Crakka bet on their fighting beasts, a wager that doesn't end well for Crakka, before the final entry Night of the Lava Zombies sees Vader finally arrive as Mustafar zombies attack.

Return to Vader's Castle is hugely fun and beautifully crafted and, hopefully, this anthology series could become a Halloween tradition that continues for a long time in Star Wars literature.

MARK NEWBOLD

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦





FORMAT: SINGLE ISSUE
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

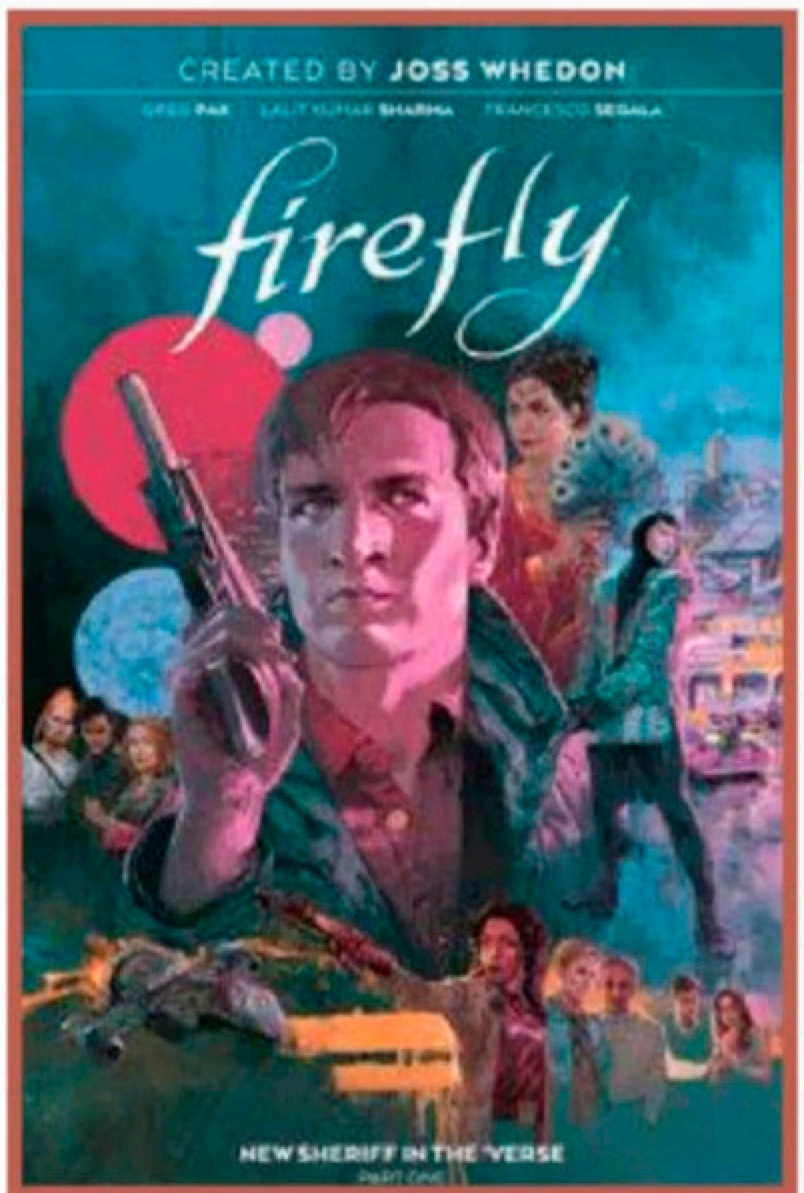
Dan O'Bannon's original script for Alien was very different to what finally ended up onscreen. Story, characters, and the proposed look were fundamentally different, and yet the DNA was still recognisably Alien. This fascinating alternate version of the classic has now finally been brought to life, courtesy of writer Seixas and artist Balbi.

O'Bannon deliberately wrote his characters as non-defined and often genderless, allowing for a wider range of casting choices, and this is reflected here. We've a female captain named Standard, and Roby, our Ripley substitute (the only specifically male character in the original script), is reimagined as a black woman. The Nostromo becomes the Snark, a still impressive but more generic ship than the movie's industrialised design. The only element closely resembling its onscreen counterpart is the cat!

Issue #1 covers familiar ground, with the crew awoken to investigate a mysterious signal, followed by the discovery of a ship and its mummified pilot on a planet's surface: humanity's first contact with alien life. Like the Nostromo, the ship and Space Jockey have reverted to their vastly different pre-Giger incarnations. And while the Swiss surrealist's input was a huge part of making Alien the classic it is, the designs presented are beautifully imagined. While it was never going to match Ridley Scott's masterpiece, it's a fascinating 'what-might-have-been' version of a sci-fi classic.

IAIN ROBERTSON

★★★☆☆


CREATED BY JOSS WHEDON
GREG PAK · LALIT KUMAR SHARMA · FRANCESCO SEGALA
firefly
NEW SHERIFF IN THE 'VERSE
PART ONE

FORMAT: TRADE PAPERBACK
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's typically a good idea to regard any spin-off media as a remix of the source material. Getting bogged down as to 'how true to the source' a particular thing is rarely works out well. Firefly: New Sheriff in the 'Verse is a great example of this; the book takes the well-loved characters from the TV show Firefly and takes them in an unexpected direction. This is a book that makes liar, cheat, and all-round scoundrel Mal Reynolds into a lawman.

It shouldn't work. You shouldn't be able to cut and paste any old Spaghetti Western cliché into Firefly and have it be fun. But it does. Mal is strong-armed by the alliance into the role of a sheriff for a backwater world. He pairs up with a cyborg friend and the rest of the Firefly cast are pretty much relegated to supporting character status. None of this fits with the established world of Firefly and it feels like a different book cosplaying as the well-loved show. But somehow it's still fun.

This is partly due to Lalit Kumar Sharma's art, which lends a sort of 'rebel storybook' style to the work. Francesco Segala's understated and washed-out colours and Jim Campbell's clear and vivid lettering also stand out.

Greg Pak's story is okay, but it's the art that sells it. This is an entertaining book if you don't worry too much about the canon.

ED FORTUNE

★★★☆☆

THE SHAPE OF ELVIRA
01
DYNAMITE

FORMAT: TRADE PAPERBACK
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 20TH

Writer David Avallone's follow-up to his 2019 series, Mistress of the Dark, is replete with wordplay, sexual innuendo, and more than a few gags that a '50s Borscht Belt comic would find hacky. That is to say, it is 100% Elvira, through and through. For those who grew up watching the Mistress of the Dark intro cheesy horror or star in her own titular horror comedy, this is right up their alley.

Granted, this 4-issue series is a knock-off of Guillermo del Toro's The Shape of Water, but in the same way that Mel Brooks' Young Frankenstein is a Universal Pictures lift – it's entirely a silly parody meant to poke fun at any number of genre tropes, with a heaping helping of eye-winking and breaking of the fourth wall. Elvira herself will turn out of the panel to address the reader directly, fully aware that this story of making a movie about a creature named Gill is silly. Using two agents of The United States Fish and Wildlife Service is a great touch that elevates this above yet another story about the craziness of the world of showbiz, and Elvira's one-liners are so spot-on, the reader can hear Cassandra Peterson's Valley Girl accent speaking each and every one.

As per usual with Dynamite's properties, the artists all seem more interested in making sure the lead looks like her real-world counterpart than creating solid art, but it's fine enough. While this isn't breaking any new ground, it's a breezy, fun little read.

NICK SPACEK

★★★☆☆

SHERLOCK
A SCANDAL IN BELGRAVIA

FORMAT: PAPERBACK
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 23RD

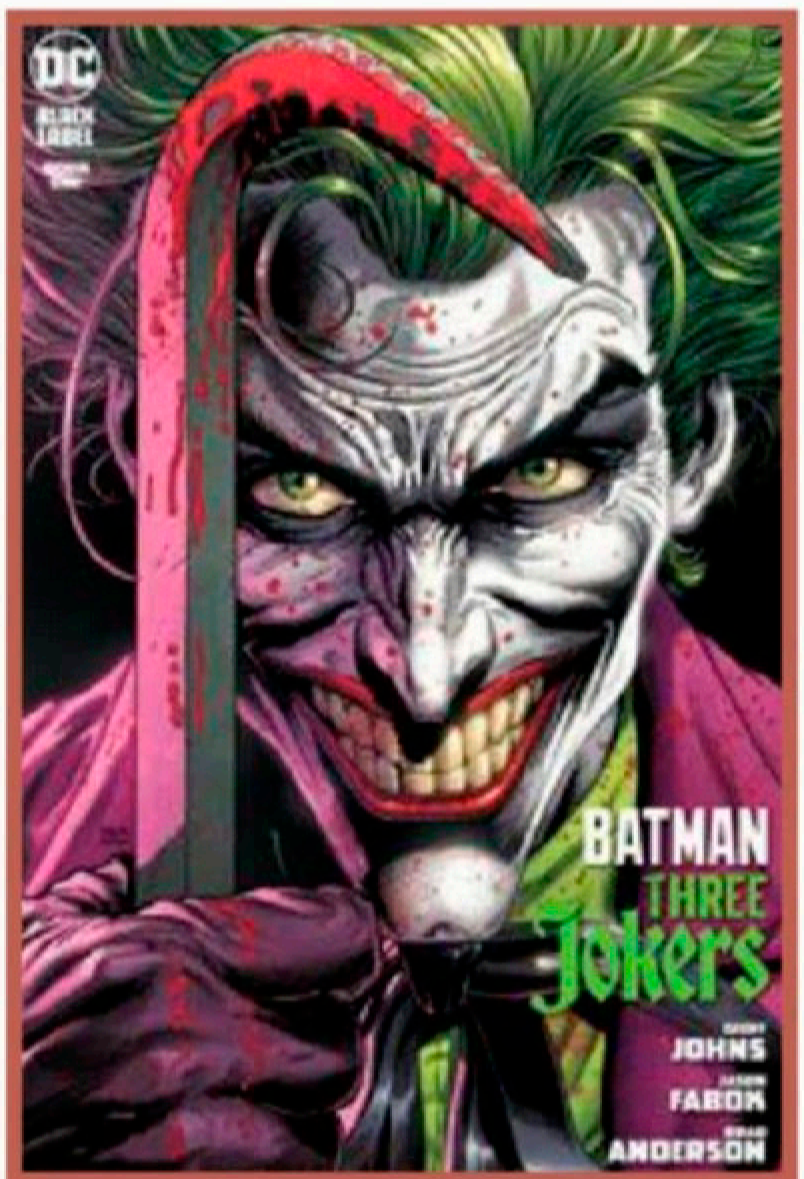
Sherlock: A Scandal in Belgravia takes the popular BBC show Sherlock and turns it into a manga-style comic book. The result is something rather charming - both Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman look absolutely stunning in the traditional Japanese style, with Sherlock Holmes looking like every inch the super-genius he's meant to be.

We get plenty of meaningful glances between Holmes and Watson and this is intensified when Moriarty turns up. The character design and the stark black and white style hammers home the style over substance approach that Steven Moffat's Sherlock is famous for. In terms of visual storytelling, this is a triumph. Unfortunately, the story this book is based on isn't very good. Appearing on our screens in 2012, the two-part tale was inspired by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's A Scandal in Bohemia, but re-imagined the character of Irene Adler as a cross between a mastermind and the ultimate victim. The stakes are low and there's no real way for the reader to engage with the mystery. Without the music and pacing of the TV show, all we really have is some nice art and Adler looking like a Disney princess.

The graphic novelisation of A Scandal in Belgravia exposes the TV show for what it really is - a tour-de-force in production and acting, but lacking in the way of anything resembling a crime/mystery story. And without that, can you truly describe it as a Sherlock Holmes story at all?

ED FORTUNE

★★☆☆☆



FORMAT: SINGLE ISSUE
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

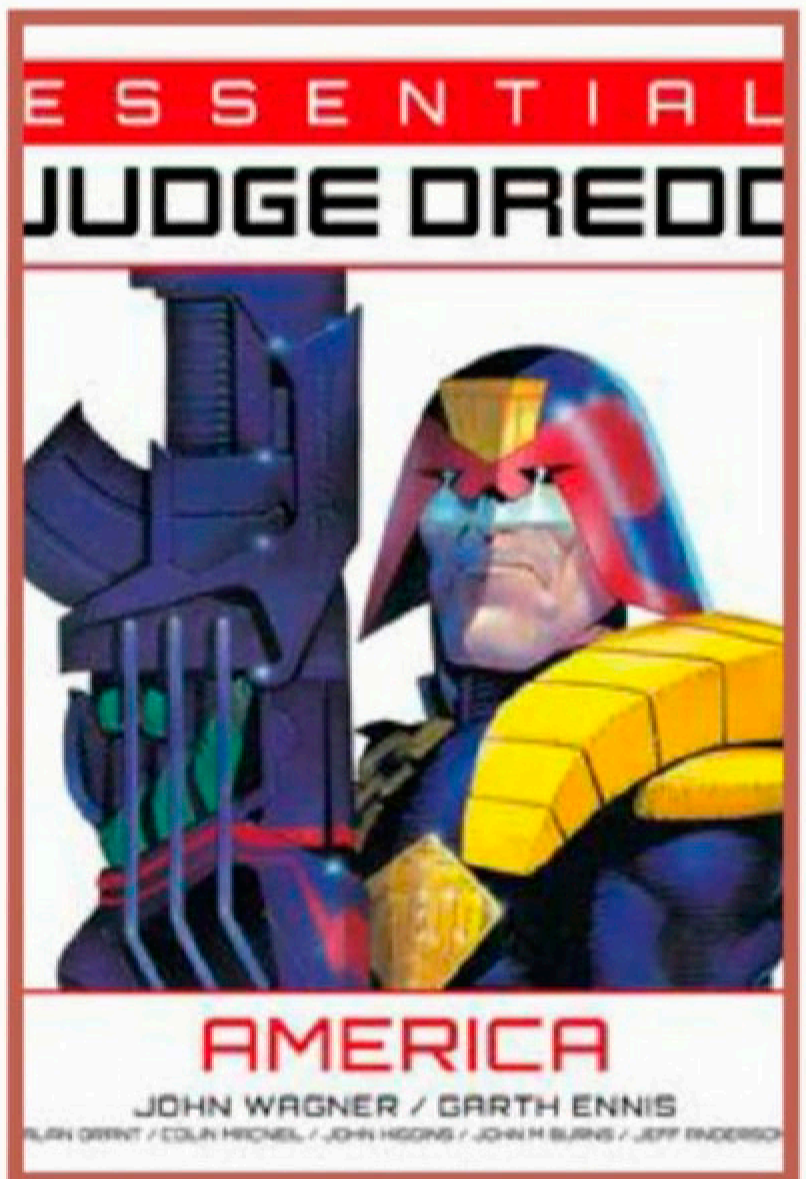
Who is the Joker? Four years after Batman asked the question during the Darkseid War, we finally get an answer. As the Dark Knight learned in 2015, there are not one but three Jokers; The Criminal, The Comedian, and The Clown. And no, that's not a metaphor, there are literally three of them.

What was once set to be a major shakeup of DC continuity is relegated to a three-part Black Label story, written by Geoff Johns (Doomsday Clock) and illustrated by Jason Fabok. As multiple Jokers are spotted across Gotham, Batman, Batgirl, and Red Hood take to the streets to put down the Clown Prince(s) of Crime before he can do too much damage. This is as much a story about confronting trauma as it is Batman and the Joker. As such, it's probably the only post-resurrection Jason Todd story worth reading.

Unfortunately, the three Jokers are the least interesting thing about Three Jokers; a story far too indebted to The Killing Joke for its own good. Why bother having three if at least two of them are practically indistinguishable? At least it explains why the world's greatest detective never clocked on before. Gorgeous and well-written as it is, it comes too late, into a market already oversaturated with Jokers. There's plenty of wiggle room after Issue 1's shocking cliffhanger, but it's only likely to get more convoluted from here, as we go deeper into the Joker-verse.

JOEL HARLEY

★★☆☆☆



FORMAT: TRADE PAPERBACK
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

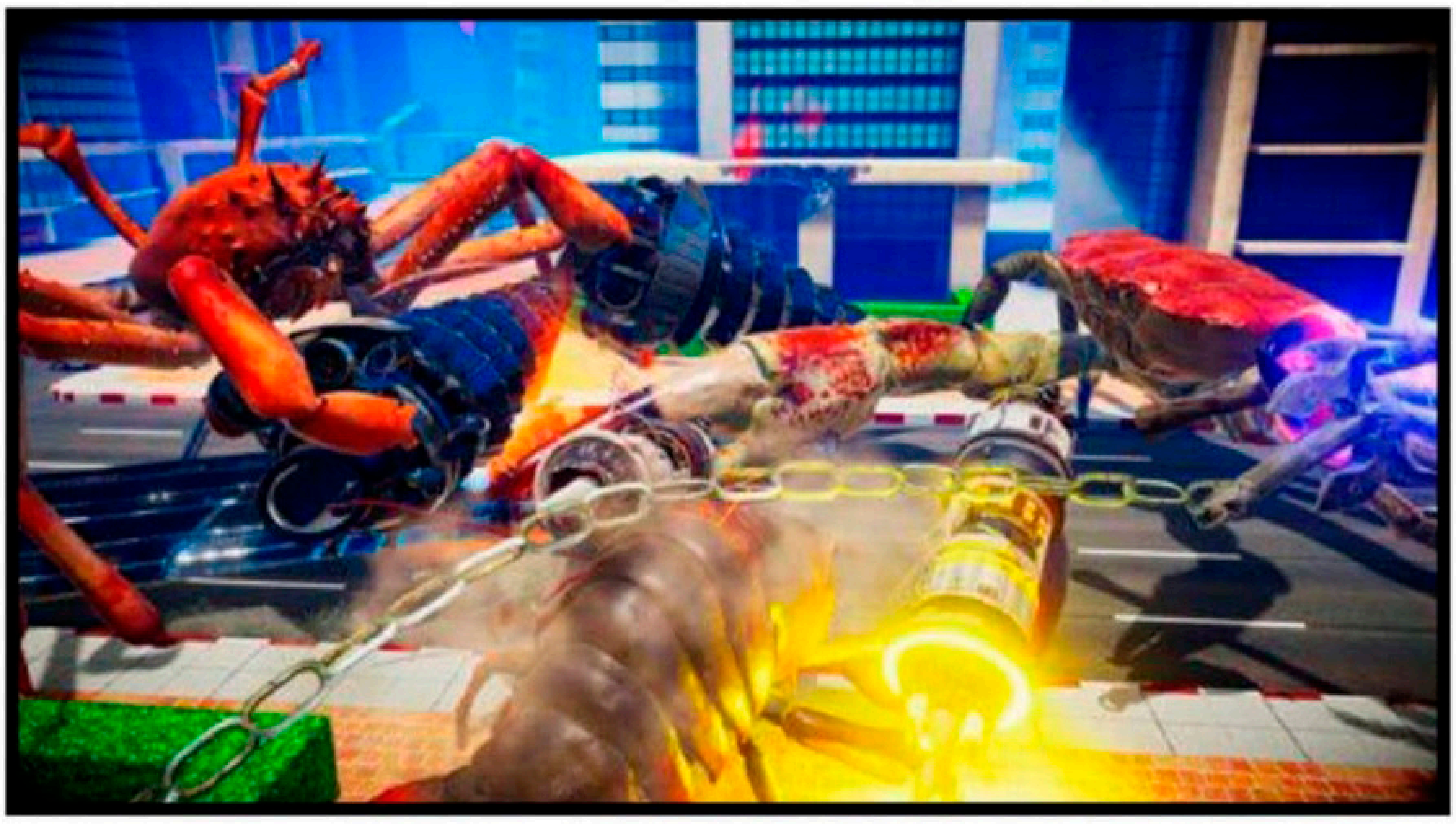
Hero. Villain. Futuristic city cop and dystopian fascist. No story better illustrates the fundamental dichotomy that is Judge Dredd than America. Dredd might be best known for battling the Dark Judges or his many adventures across the Cursed Earth, but his handlers at 2000 AD aren't afraid of going political either; and this is when the character really shines.

Essential Judge Dredd: America not only reprints John Wagner's classic titular story, but also those that preceded and followed it too – Letter from a Democrat, Revolution, Politics, The Devil You Know, and Twilight's Last Gleaming. Had this been written in the here and now, we'd be dismissing it as too on-the-nose. It's depressing – not for how little has changed, but for how much the real world has caught up with Mega-City One. It's a case of life imitating art, as the heavily armed police force of the future kidnap peaceful protestors, initiate riots, and brutally beat civilians into submission left, right, and centre. Did we mention that this story was written 30 years ago?

This first volume of a new series by Rebellion delivers exactly what it promises. Essential Judge Dredd is essential reading; not only for fans or newbies to Dredd's world, but anyone remotely invested in comic books and literature at large. Right now, it's more relevant than ever.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★



FIGHT CRAB

PLATFORM: SWITCH + PC

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In Fight Crab, you're a crab and you get to fight other crabs. Didn't see that coming, did you?! The idea is to grab, punch, and throw things at your opponents, build up their Smash Bros-style damage percentage, then flip them onto their back. If they stay down for a count of three, it's all over! Beating a crab unlocks it for purchase in the shop, where you can eventually buy more than 20 different crabs and almost 50 different weapons. With your stats upgraded as far as your crab coins will allow, battle your way through all manner of bizarre locations to become the number one crab of all time!

Motion controls are enabled by default, so you can flail your actual arms around and see your movements replicated in crab form on screen. There's a standard control option too, although it's very awkwardly mapped to the controller and takes a fair bit of getting used to. Whichever way you play, it's a bit hit and miss; the gameplay gets repetitive fairly quickly, and manoeuvring these ten-tonne tank-like buggers isn't easy - you're never quite sure if that fancy move you pulled off was down to your own skill or just pure good luck.

But it's so ridiculous, over the top, garish, and downright spectacular that it's difficult to stop playing. It's certainly something you won't have seen before and are unlikely to witness anywhere else (a basic photo mode is available so you can immortalise your crabby conquests and prove to your friends that you aren't making any of this up, honest). There's even a very generous amount of multiplayer options and battle modes. It's completely absurd from start to finish, but that's what makes it so enjoyable. Fight Crab is the Deadly Premonition of crab fighting games. If that doesn't sell you on it, nothing will!

CHRIS JACKSON

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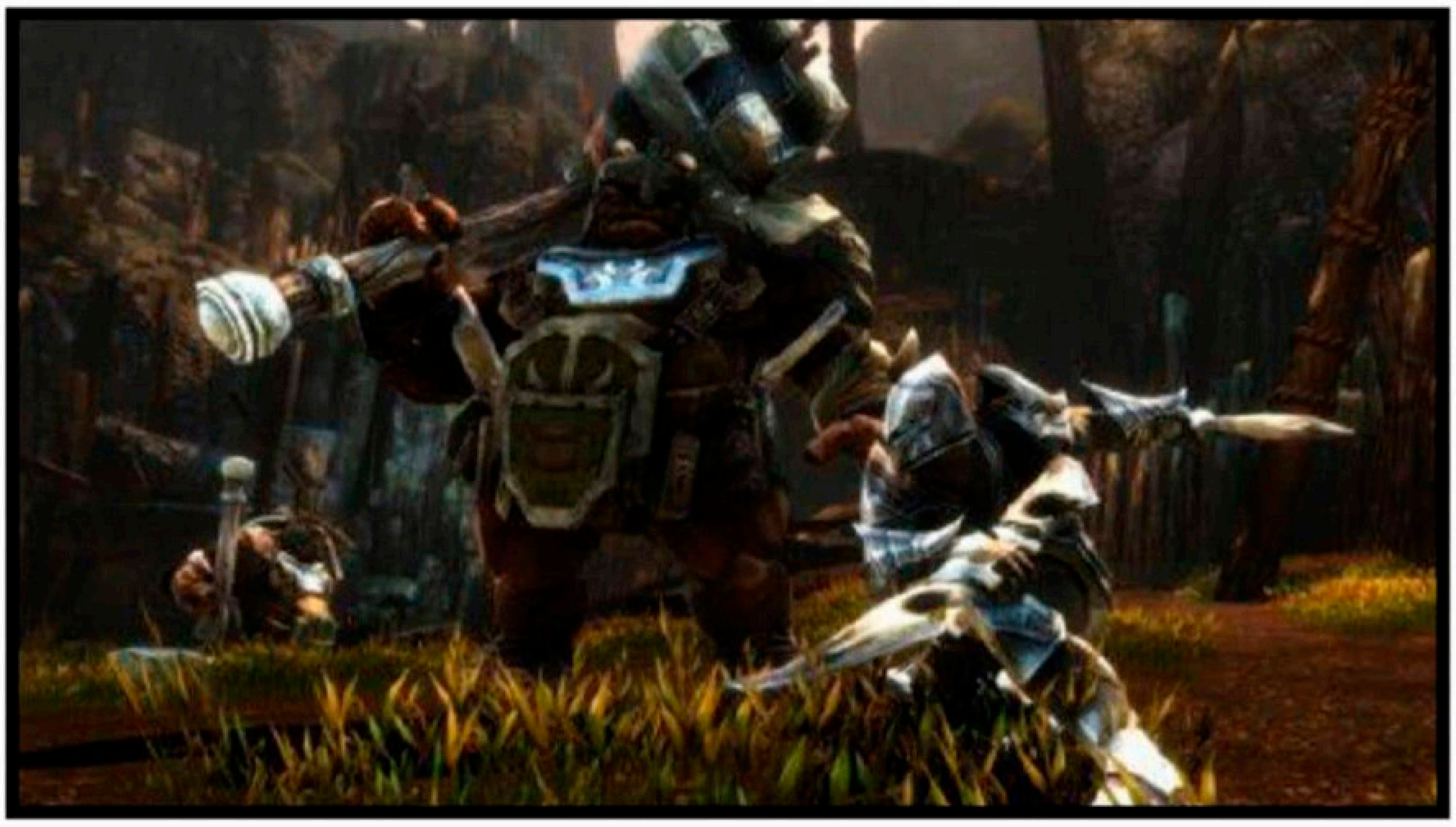

KINGDOMS OF AMALUR: RE-RECKONING

PLATFORM: PS4 + PC, XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Set in a world that falls somewhere between Fable's cartoonish irreverence and Skyrim's seriousness, Kingdoms of Amalur was originally released in 2012 to a decent amount of critical acclaim. Unfortunately, the timing of its arrival (just a few short months after Skyrim) and some well-publicised behind the scenes shenanigans meant that its public reception didn't meet expectations and the game has languished in the vaults ever since...

The high fantasy story, written by R. A. Salvatore (Chewbacca-killing author of Vector Prime, the first of the Star Wars: The New Jedi Order books) and with art direction from Spawn creator Todd McFarlane, follows an unnamed human, brought back to life to find themselves embroiled in a vicious war between a corrupt power-hungry leader and an immortal race of Amalurians. Considering the complete story spans 10,000 years' worth of lore, that's as good a summary as we can give right now!

KoA is a prime example of a game from a more simple time when RPGs had been as well-refined as possible before overbearing nonsense like survival meters and stamina bars became the norm. Players are able to either specialise in or merge aspects of magic, hand-to-hand combat and stealth classes depending on their individual playstyle, the world and its inhabitants are a delight to interact with and the fast-paced arcade-style combat is simple but satisfying. Enhanced visuals, welcome tweaks to the enemy levelling system and the promise of new content just around the corner easily make this a worthwhile purchase for existing fans and, while newcomers should maybe keep in mind that Kingdoms of Amalur is eight years old, it remains a very enjoyable journey and the gameplay holds up tremendously well. It's not every day that such a wonderful 'forgotten' game like this gets a second chance. If it passed you by the first time around, don't let it happen again!

CHRIS JACKSON

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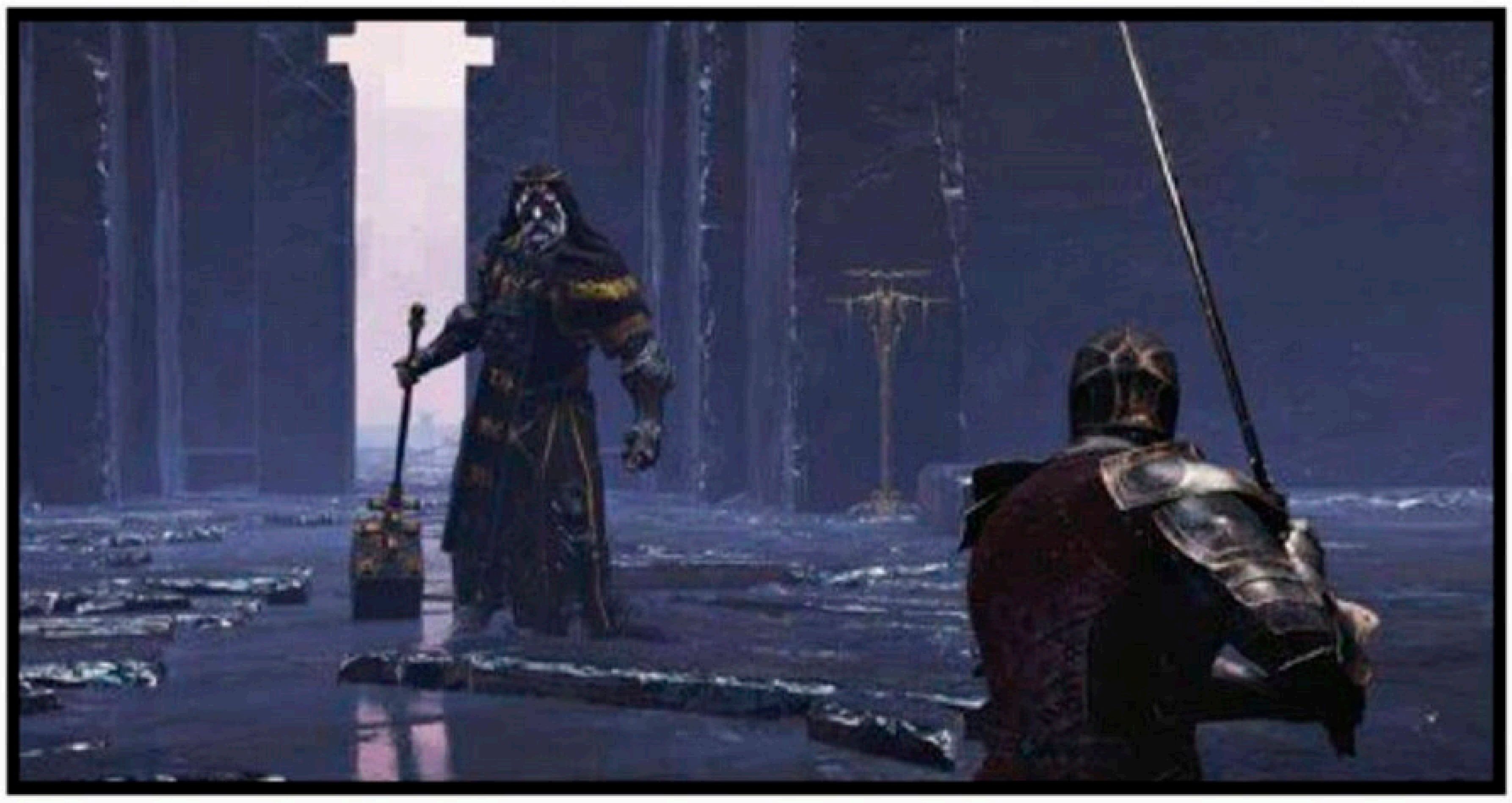

MORTAL SHELL

PLATFORM: XBOX ONE + PC, PS4

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The latest in a long line of Souls-like games, Mortal Shell very much wears its influences on its sleeve but makes enough changes to feel new and exciting. Players are cast as a frail, withered husk of a human, able to withstand no more than a single blow from even the weakest of enemies. To gain power, you'll need to possess the bodies of various corpses – the mortal shells of the game's title. Four fallen warriors can be found, each with individual skill trees that can be upgraded using the game's answer to souls (which, naturally, are dropped upon death but can be reclaimed on your next attempt). Inside a shell, your health and stamina bars become much longer, although any finishing blow from an enemy will knock you out of your body...

There are tons of useful items to find, and using these items builds up 'familiarity', which reveals additional effects, rewarding players who take the time to explore the environment and experiment with what they find. The world itself isn't as big as those seen in other games, but it's wonderfully oppressive and atmospheric. It's also full of secrets, which will suit players of an inquisitive nature.

Mortal Shell isn't the easiest game to get your head around. It leaves players to make sense of the game's world all on their own, and it's also brutally difficult until you manage to snag a few upgrades. Having said that, it's absolutely worth persevering with. When it all clicks, Mortal Shell reveals its true form as a genuinely excellent Souls-like. It strips away some of the more cumbersome aspects of similar games and throws in a few new twists that are sure to please genre veterans, and four available 'shells' effectively equals four different characters to play with. It doesn't overstay its welcome either, which is always appreciated!

CHRIS JACKSON

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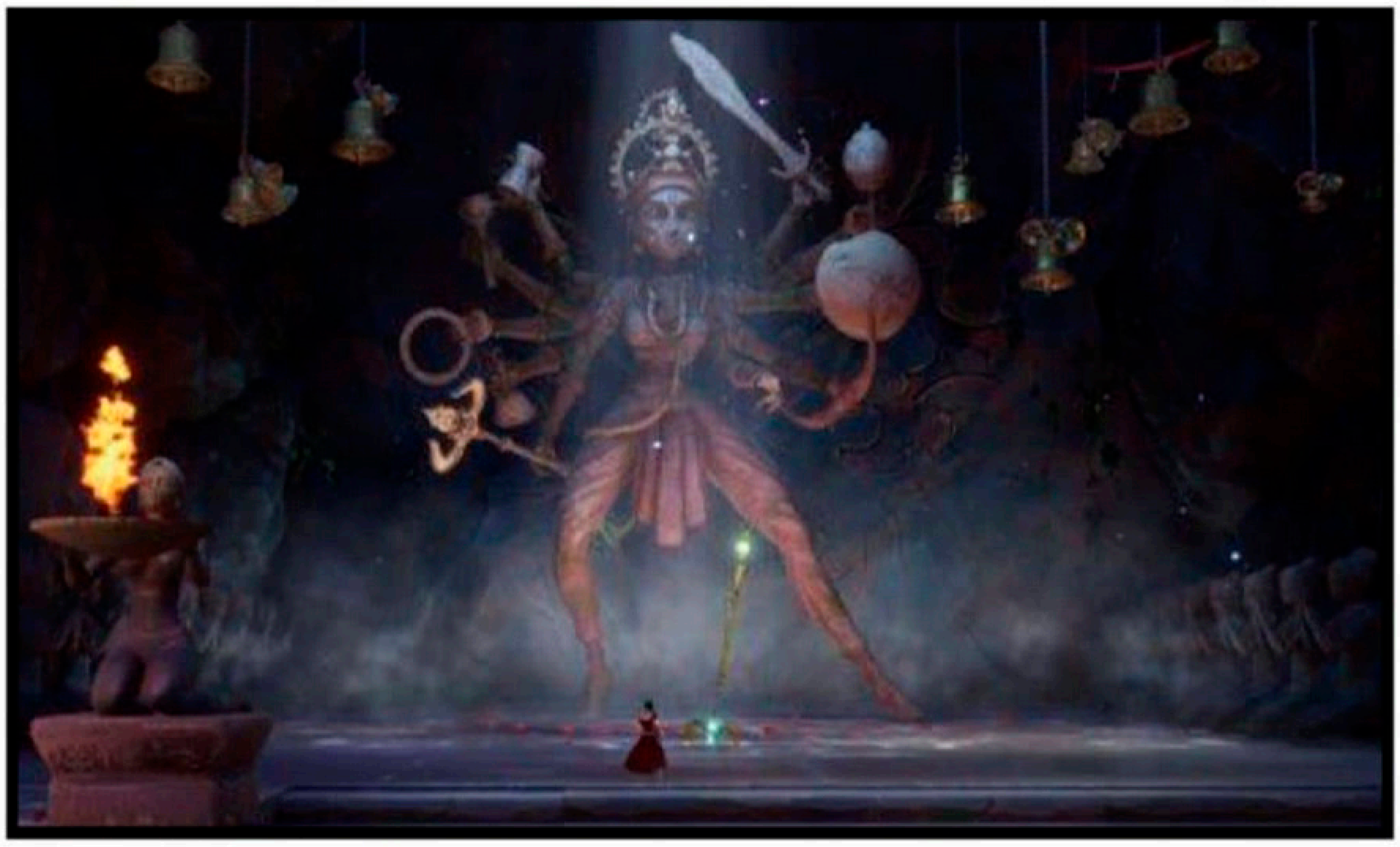

RAJI: AN ANCIENT EPIC

PLATFORM: SWITCH

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Inspired by Hindu and Balinese folklore, Raji: An Ancient Epic is the debut game from Indian developers Nodding Heads Games. It follows a young girl called Raji, whose brother has been kidnapped by demons. Aided by various gods and goddesses, Raji will need to track down her brother's captors and defeat the demon lord Mahabalasura in what becomes an all-consuming battle for humanity.

An Ancient Epic is an action-adventure game where the focus is split between Tomb Raider-esque platforming – climbing walls, leaping between pillars, that sort of thing – and combat. Demonic entities appear every so often, and must be taken down by a handful of two-button combos and stylish parkour-style attacks that involve swinging around poles and vaulting off walls. Several different weapons become available throughout the game, and it's easy to swap between them at any time. They all have unique abilities too, which can be upgraded using orbs found in lesser-visited parts of the world, giving players plenty of ways to unleash devastating attacks onto their foes.

It's a very linear adventure with no branching paths (although those hidden orbs require some careful exploration), so players will rarely find themselves getting lost. The environments are beautiful, with lots of huge, towering buildings and smaller surprising details like rainbow-coloured sunlight filtering through open windows giving an incredibly dramatic sense of scale, and the soundtrack, which mixes traditional Indian and modern western instruments, enhances the overall atmosphere perfectly.

Satisfying gameplay, beautiful visuals, and themes that are rarely explored in games make this title an absolute joy to play. It's a shame that the fixed camera makes it impossible to fully take in the surroundings, but that's purely intended as a commendation of how beautiful the game is. Hopefully, Raji will have another adventure one day. It's a world that demands to be explored much, much further.

CHRIS JACKSON

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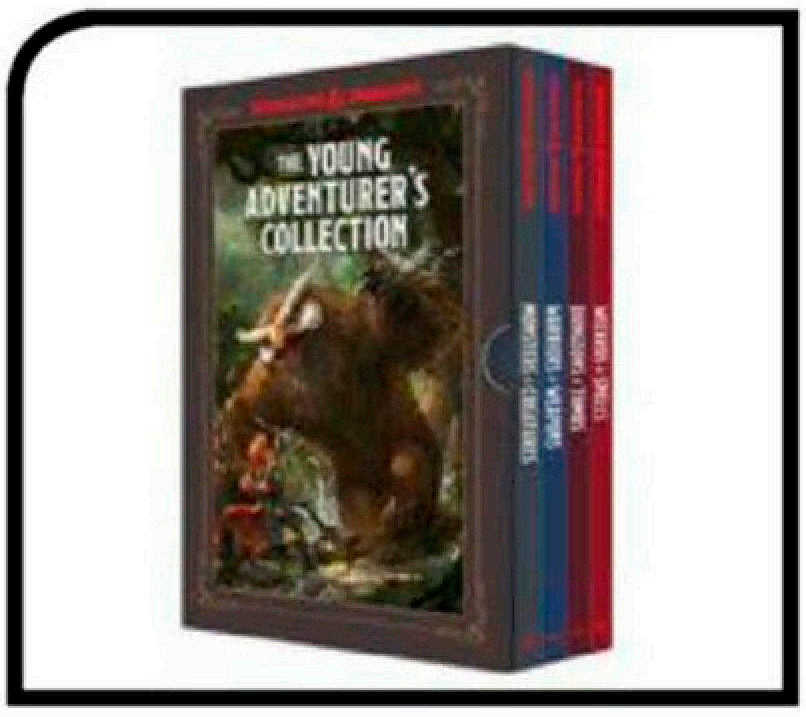


THE YOUNG ADVENTURER'S COLLECTION

PUBLISHER: WIZARDS OF THE COAST
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 6TH

Dungeons & Dragons is a game played by people of all ages all over the world, though getting into it can be a little daunting. It's fantasy 'let's pretend' with rules, but it also has its own lore and traditions than can take a while to get used to.

The Young Adventurer's Collection brings together four short, hardback books aimed at young minds. Each delves into an aspect of D&D, but without burdening the reader with rules or similar complexities. They all dive straight into the juicy world-building, giving the young reader a thirst for adventure. Warriors and Weapons describes the various D&D character classes, races, and equipment you may want to play in a game. We get legendary examples, so we get a nice write up of Minsc and Boo, as well as the difference between a vampire hunter's pack and a dungeoneer's outfit.

Wizards and Spells is an illustrated guide to the magic system of D&D (something that's spawned many imitators) and goes through the types of spells characters will use in a game, as well as magical weapons, tools, wands etc. Dungeons and Tombs takes the reader through some classic D&D adventures as well as advice for young players and dungeon masters. Monsters and Creatures is a treat, a little book filled with lots of weird beasties and a guide to spotting dragons. Each book is well made and will fit easily inside a school bag.

This set is perfect for getting the family into D&D and excellent for encouraging imaginative play. Gorgeous, fun, and something special.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★☆

ICONS OF THE REALMS: ICEWIND DALE

PUBLISHER: WIZKIDS
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 30TH

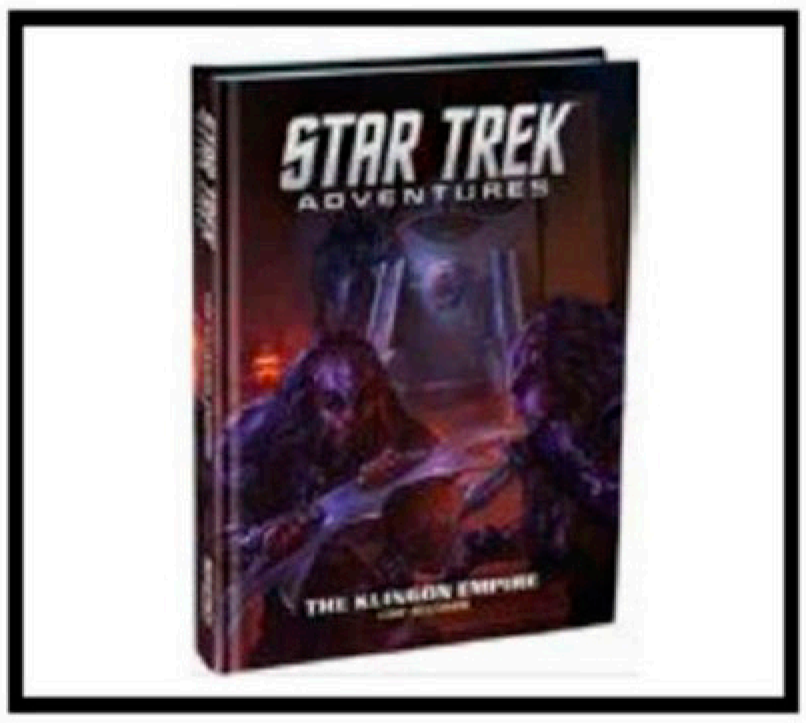
Icewind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden is the forthcoming Dungeons & Dragons campaign that, as the name suggests, is set in a sub-zero part of the Forgotten Realms, the mountainous and inhospitable region known as the Spine of the World. Inspired by movies such as the The Thing and Ravenous, it's a horror-themed story and adventure. The titular Frostmaiden is a goddess who can take many, many different forms and has an agenda of pure evil.

All of which sounds like very thrilling stuff, but how exactly do you represent that on the gaming table? Well you can always opt to pick up an Icons of the Realms box for Icewind Dale. There are a total of 44 models in the range.

Most striking is the snowy owlbear. Sat on its haunches, it's rather cute, but it's also a large creature. Despite possessing both the cuteness of a snowy owl and a polar bear, it's also powerful enough to kill the party; a lovely mix of charming and deadly. The Cold Crone model is an owl-headed monster straight from the abyss, and its translucent cloak and hideous visage is both haunting and thematic. The range has several huge models; we particularly liked the Frost Giant Skeleton, a massive undead creature that looks like a clichéd Viking, horned helmet and all. The Tomb Tapper is simply the stuff of nightmare. The over-arching vibe of this range is spooky and cold. The models are colourful, well posed and painted, each piece is robust and scary - perfect for horror fantasy gaming.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★



THE STAR TREK ADVENTURES CORE RULEBOOK

PUBLISHER: MODIPHUS
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 21ST

The Star Trek Adventures Core Rulebook is a complete system in terms of Starfleet allowing you to run around the galaxy playing one of those lovely Federation types and be all jolly and happy, boldly going where no one has gone before. It's a great game but it only explores a fraction of the Star Trek universe. Players wanted something different, and publisher Modiphus has responded by producing the Star Trek Adventures Klingon Core Rulebook. It's an intriguing mix of the same, but different.

This is a core book, so you don't need the fluffy Federation book to play, and all the existing supplements are compatible. It's also much more coherent than the other book, making both character creation and combat much clearer and accessible. The general advice on how to run the game is much improved by the shift in perspective; Klingon stories are still essentially about going out into the galaxy and making your mark, it's just the focus is different, and the character progression rules have been adjusted to reflect this.

The majority of the book is dedicated to Klingon history, background, and story ideas. Though it's likely you've seen a lot of this via the books, movies, and TV shows, it's nice to have it in one place and, specifically, told from the Klingon point of view. After all, the Klingons are the heroes in this version of the game, so the background material is adjusted accordingly. And let's be honest, who doesn't want the chance to punch Kirk in the face sometimes?

ED FORTUNE

★★★★☆

BRAVE NEW WORDS

EXPLORING THE WORLD OF GENRE LITERATURE WITH
ED FORTUNE

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

For this issue's Brave New Words, I got a chance to talk to Lindsay Ellis about her debut book, Axiom's End. Lindsay is best known for her long-form video essays, mostly critiquing movies. Her work saw her nominated for a Hugo Award back in 2019.

STARBURST: So what's the pitch for *Axiom's End*?
Lindsay Ellis: Oh, man, I hate pitching it because I think it's like every time I describe it, I'm like, wow, this sounds terrible because it does kind of sound like a very stale alien government conspiracy narrative. It's an alternate history where a sort of WikiLeaks-like organisation leaks some alien stuff.

Why is it set in 2007?
It just didn't make sense to do it in Trump's America. A lot of the stuff that happens in the book assumes that there is still some political decorum. That people still play the game politicking matters and scandal would be recognised, as there's a scandal in the book centred on the alien conspiracy. And a lot of people have said they found that unrealistic. And I don't think it's unrealistic. I think people have just become so inured to scandal since Trump got elected that everything that came before feels like it didn't really happen. It made sense to set it during the dawning of the golden age of whistle-blowers.

> **"What if Julian Assange had found out about aliens."**

The main character, Cora - her father's responsible for this whole mess. Did you build the world around Cora, or was it the other way round?
Characters upward. The keystone for the entire book was sort of the dynamic between the two leads, such as it were. And then it built out from there, combined with this pitch that I came up with in grad school for one of my screenwriting classes, which was 'what if Julian Assange had found out about the aliens'.

She has a very bad relationship with her father, and she kind of always has. I think that in some people, especially oldest female children, you'll either go hard in one direction or another. Either you demand the attention that your parent is getting or you completely disappear and just kind of like fade into the background. Cora has definitely chosen the latter.

The other lead character is the alien, Ampersand. Where do you start with a character like that?
I thought a lot about creature design. And I've done some work about it on my channel where you think in terms of design that you are communicating something about that character. You have a character like E.T., where he's kind of ugly, but mostly really cute. Like he's an ugly, old man. And he's got these really big eyes. So immediately this communicates that this is a friendly thing, whereas H.R. Giger's Xenomorph is the opposite. He has no eyes. And combined with all of these elements is a skeleton crossed with an arachnid. So those are communicating things about the character in the story. And so I wanted Ampersand, particularly in terms of design, to be like this middle ground between something really beautiful in the way that nature is beautiful and something really terrifying, like, again, Giger's Xenomorph. So I was trying to look for that exact middle ground, but building upwards from this ancestral alien biology. Ampersand is basically a cyborg. But what did their natural evolution look like? What did their social structure look like? How was their evolution different from ours? Because I also decided they need to be bipeds, they need to have hands, and then have two eyes, like it couldn't be too weird.

It's a very accessible writing style. Why choose that approach?
Definitely. I wanted it to be easy. I didn't want it to be a slog. I think that has honestly been a problem, especially with the more prestige literary fiction, and in science fiction, like the award-winning stuff, it does tend to be really long and heavy. And it doesn't flow like a page-turner should. It's kind of odd to me that people almost look down on that because the stuff you're reading should be fun, right?

The response to *Axiom's End* has been very good. Is a sequel planned?
It's called *Truth of the Divine*. And it comes out next October. We're in revisions for that right now.

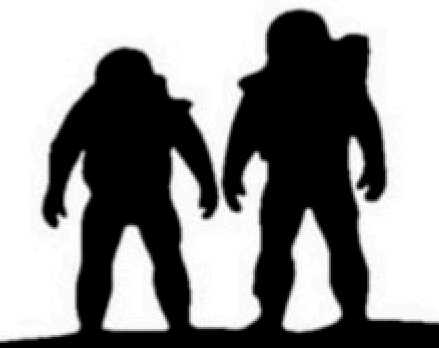
> **"I do think that the way George R.R. Martin conducted himself did deserve some scrutiny."**

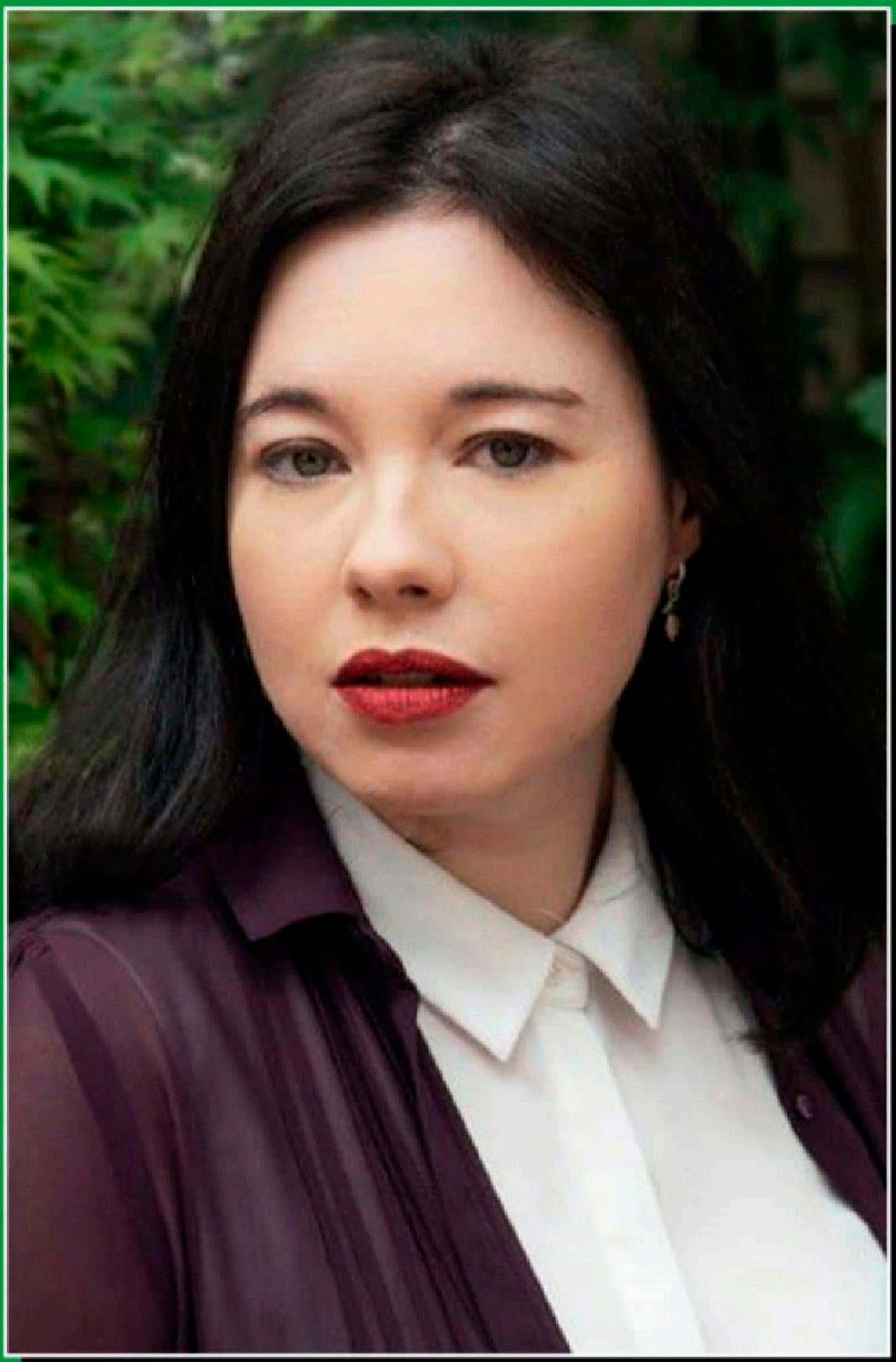
If you got to write for a franchise, what would you pick?
Transformers. The IDW *Transformers* specifically. Jim Roberts, the guy who wrote it, I feel I can comfortably call him an inspiration. I remember when *More Than Meets the Eye* was getting really popular again when I was writing the first draft of the book that eventually became *Axiom's End*. I was kind of dispirited by it because I was like, 'this guy is doing everything I wish I could do, but he's doing it so much better than I am capable of doing'. But yeah, I really love those books. I think those are sort of life goals for the way he blends sci-fi action with relationships and characters that you care about. But also they're giant robots that are also toys!

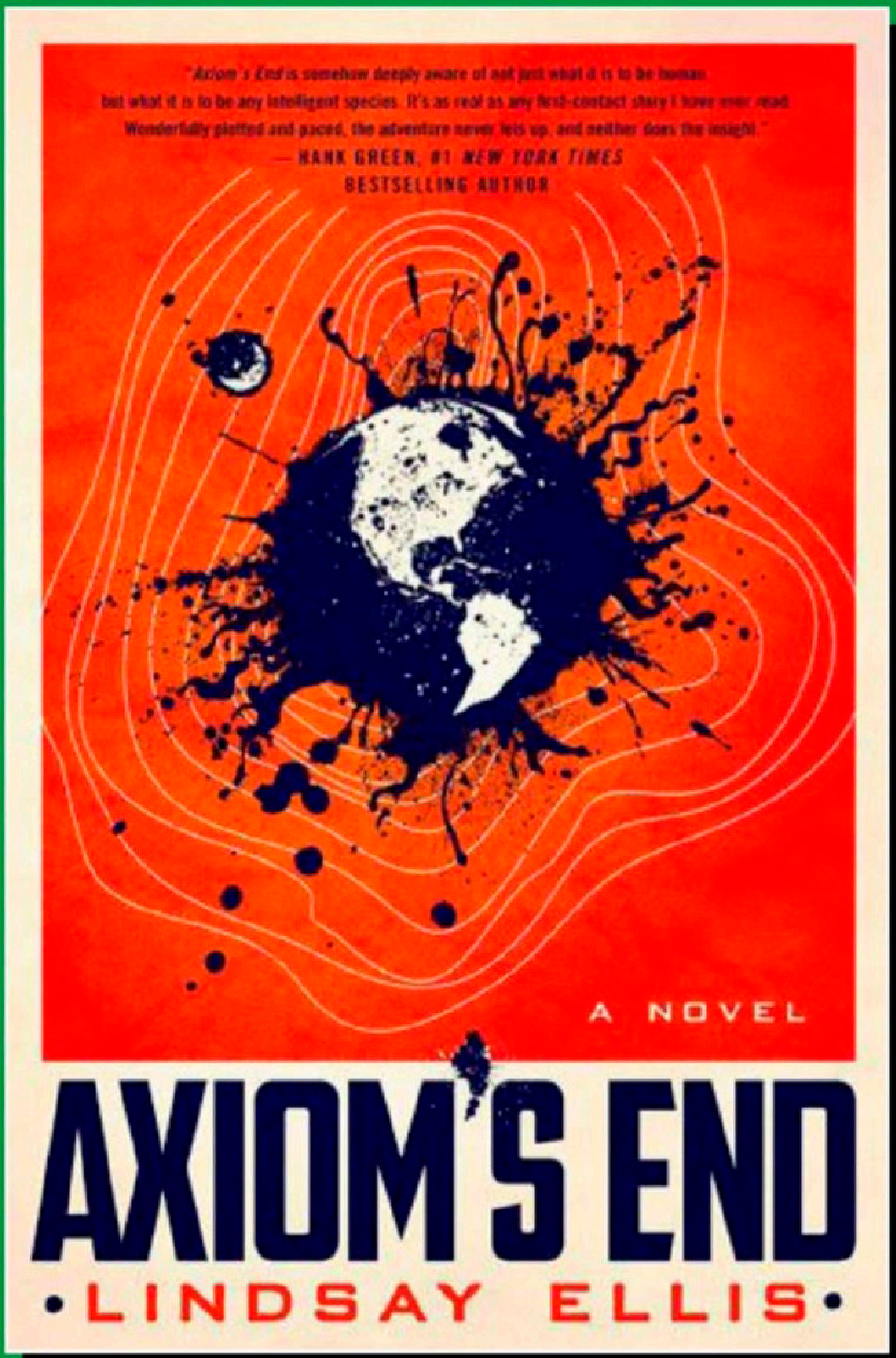
You've been nominated for a Hugo award in the past. What is your take on the recent Hugo Award ceremony presented by George R.R. Martin? A lot of people got angry about it, especially on social media.
Twitter is not Worldcon, right? What's going on with Twitter is not indicative at all of Worldcon. Twitter is just so miserable. I know Worldcon is really important to people, that you guys are extremely validating to people that have worked really hard and the fact that they are opening up to marginalised voices and even starting to favour them is great. But I just see so much Sturm und Drang about this thing that is fundamentally supposed to be like a fun thing, you know? It's not your day job. It's a science fiction convention that is made by and for fans, and if it's bringing you so much unhappiness, why are we doing this?

I mostly stayed out of it after I said that. I do think that the way George R.R. Martin conducted himself did deserve some scrutiny. I think it was weird that he went to bat for John Campbell after everybody decided to say 'maybe not him'. I think it was a deliberate choice. And I think it deserves some scrutiny. But Twitter immediately went to 11 on him. I'm like, guys, this is why nobody takes you seriously. I think you do have to take the good with the bad. That's being a person. We have to be able to have these discussions without wholesale condemning people. George R.R. Martin is not Vox Day. Twitter encourages you to assume bad faith. This year has been so hellish.

AXIOM'S END is available via all good sellers of books. LINDSAY ELLIS' video essays can be found on YouTube.



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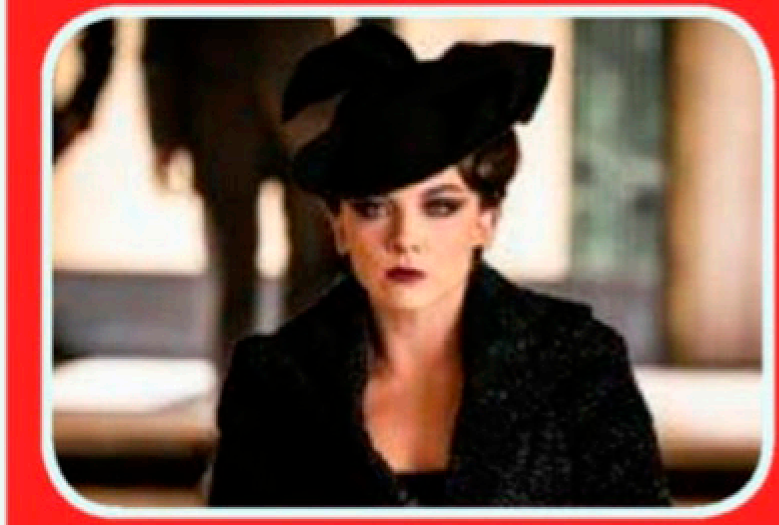
A NOVEL
AXIOM'S END
•LINDSAY ELLIS•

Paul Mount's

This issue, we mourn the premature passing of PENNY DREADFUL: CITY OF ANGELS, take refuge under THE UMBRELLA ACADEMY, leap aboard the COBRA KAI bandwagon, and belatedly remind you that you BETTER CALL SAUL…



TV shows. They come and go, like summer rain. You get your fantasy fangs stuck into some great new genre show. Be it a whizzy, snarky superhero show on Netflix or Amazon, a timely parable for our times on Sky Atlantic, a period horror on some other streaming service you probably had no idea even existed. Then it's gone, consigned to the Great TV Show Dumper in the Sky, the victim of some mind-mangling budget/audience ratings mathematical ratio whatnot or, worryingly, axed because the sheer effort and expense of making it in a tricky post-COVID world isn't worth the potential return. Since we were last together, a handful of shows I was quite taken with have bitten the dust as well as a couple I will shed no tears for. At the time of writing, Netflix has pulled the plug on the promising **I Am Not Okay With This**, a teen show with some real edge that I enjoyed despite my current reluctance to spend my time watching angry teenagers screaming at me from the TV screen (that's very specifically *you*, **Fort Salem**), AMC's dreary and rather stupid **NOS4R2** has been staked after two seasons, and Amazon's prohibitively-expensive cyberpunk drama **Altered Carbon** has been deleted despite the fact that its second season starred my mate Anthony Mackie (long, dull story). Netflix also axed something called **The Society** that I am sure I tried for a few episodes but have no memory of - so no loss there. But the axing that has most distressed me recently was the plug-pulling by Showtime of their lavish and captivating **Penny Dreadful** 'sequel' series **City of Angels** (Sky Atlantic/Now TV in the UK). It stars Natalie Dormer in a handful of roles as various manipulative incarnations of a demon from Mexican folklore stalking late 1930s Los Angeles to prove to Santa Muerte (the caretaker of the dead) that the human condition is intrinsically evil, if not abhorrent. She would have been better off spending some time in 2020, frankly…

The original **Penny Dreadful** ran on Showtime for three seasons between 2014 and 2016. The creation of screenwriter John Logan, it was set in a heightened Victorian London and drew from the influences suggested by its title - cheap, lurid horror stories churned out for the masses. It concocted a vivid and convoluted story that involved Frankenstein's monster, a werewolf, and Dracula all vaguely brought together by a typically gonzo performance from Eva Green as the increasingly-deranged Vanessa Ives. The show was canned after its third season, and this new iteration of the title is clearly a branding

PENNY DREADFUL: CITY OF ANGELS

THE UMBRELLA ACADEMY

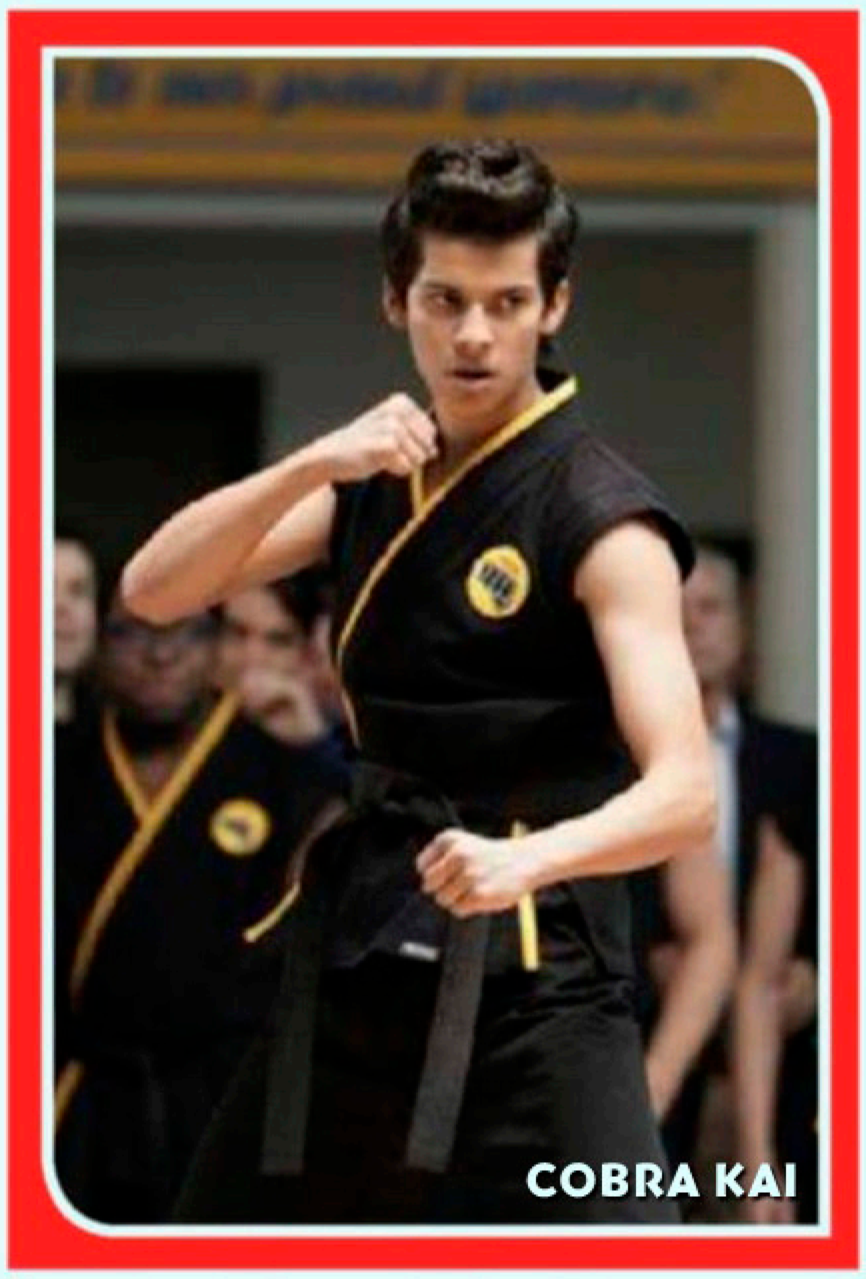
exercise only, an unconnected storyline sold purely on the perceived strength of a title the public might recognise and be willing to take a punt at. But to be honest, lumbering **City of Angels** with the expectations of a different show ultimately did it no favours. This was a rawer, and far less lurid series, whose narrative dealt intelligently and thoughtfully with racial tensions in Los Angeles and the creeping rise of Nazism all wrapped around a gruesome murder investigation and with the supernatural elements wandering - a little awkwardly, sometimes - around the edges of much more interesting real-world flashpoint moments. Many critics were unmoved by the series, but I was quickly won over by its outstanding production values, stunning performances, and storylines that never made light of their subject matter but treated them with a full and proper sense of respect. Some found the occasional flash of the supernatural a little off-putting. Still, **City of Angels** managed to tread a fine line between presenting the bald truth of a city on the edge and demeaning its reality by suggesting that some fanciful supernatural entity is the cause of man's worst ills. Natalie Dormer lit up the screen in her roles as the demon itself and its human incarnations as a mousey if manipulative political aide, a seductive German housewife (and her own son!), and a vivacious provocative gang leader. She was so utterly convincing and compelling in each role that it took me a good two or three episodes to realise that the same actor was playing each individual character. Elsewhere, the cast included the ever-reliable Rory Kinnear (the only actor to make his way over from the original series) as a German paediatrician who wants a quiet life in the USA and is desperate to avoid the creeping tide of Nazism as Europe edges towards war. Daniel Zovatto is Tiago Vega, the first Mexican-American detective to join the Los Angeles Police Department, much to the distrust and suspicion not just of his new colleagues but also his fiercely-protective community. But Hollywood veteran Nathan Lane stole every scene in his role as bluff but kindly and well-meaning senior LA detective Lewis Michener, so often a voice of reason and sanity in a world collapsing into chaos and violence.

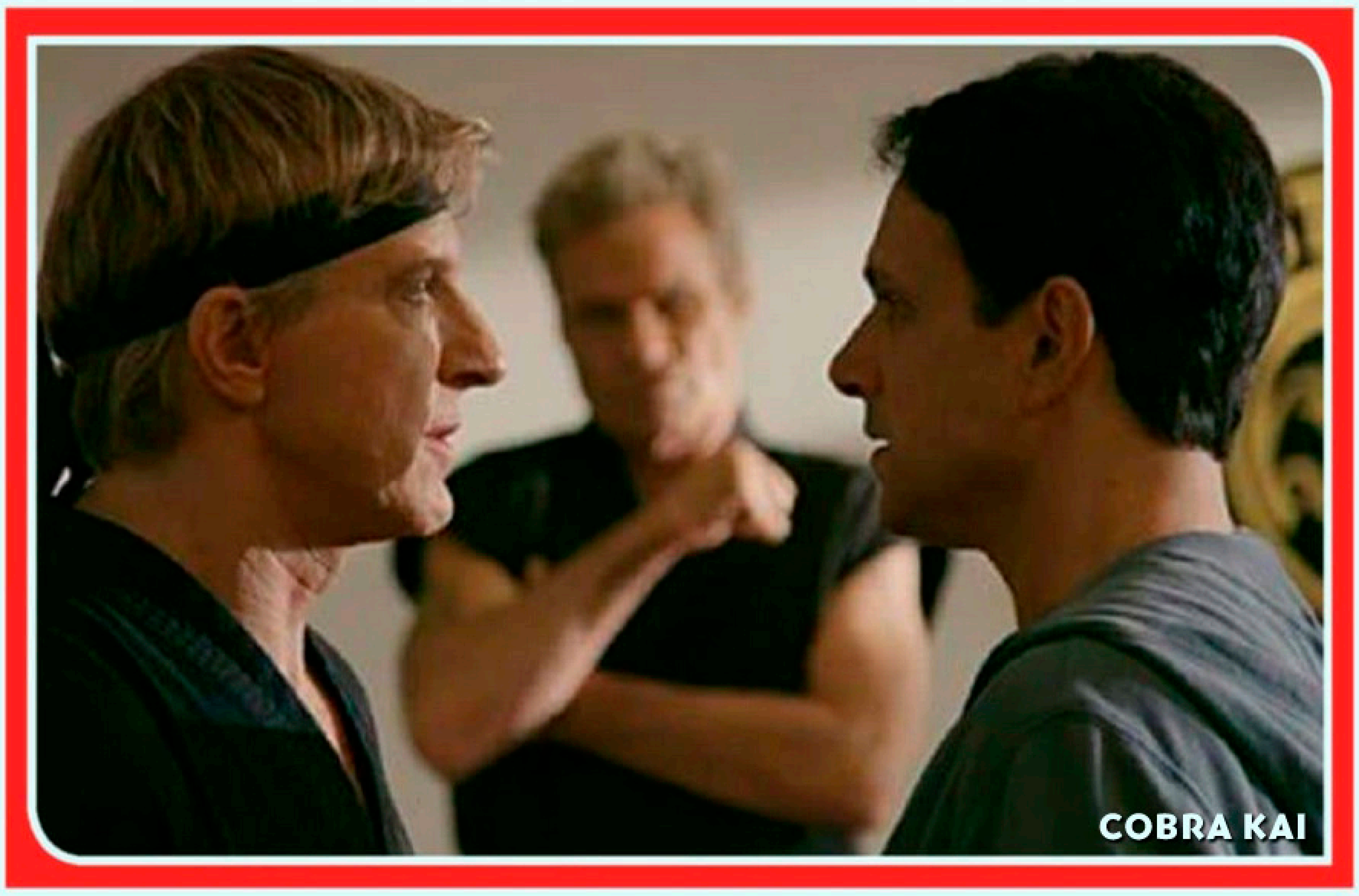
Penny Dreadful: City of Angels was probably a series too extravagant to survive, each episode packed with elaborately choreographed dance sequences, huge crowd scenes, astonishing period reconstructions, big action sequences, riots - in the new TV production world where actors have to stand 2 metres apart, and groups of supporting artists are kept to a minimum, it was always going to be easier to move on to something a little less labour intensive rather than recommission a show of this size. But I loved the scope and scale of **City of Angels**, I love the way it wasn't afraid to deal with edgy and potentially contentious issues, and its performances entranced me. It'll certainly be figuring quite highly on my list of favourite shows of the year.

Season 2 of Netflix's **The Umbrella Academy** will be on that same list too. I enjoyed the first series despite its manic, undisciplined storyline and the odd grating performance. Still, Season 2 saw this quirky, oddball 'superhero' show finding its feet and proving its worth. At the end of the first season, the children of the dysfunctional super-powered Hargreeves family found themselves escaping the apocalypse and flung back in time to the early 1960s thanks to the time-mangling powers of Five, the youngest in the clan (played with an extraordinary maturity by Aidan Gallagher, just sixteen years old during filming). They all find themselves in different years. Five himself arrives on November 25th, 1963 in the middle of yet another apocalyptic event and he eventually realises that he has just ten days to reassemble the fractured family who have by now carved out new lives in their own years in the 1960s to prevent the destruction of the human race. Again.

Season 2 is big, bold, bonkers stuff and yet it seemed more disciplined than the first. The story was more linear, the characterisation sharper (and, in the case of Robert Sheehan's flamboyant drug addict Klaus, less irritating). The violence was bigger and more comic strip than ever, the use of music often hair-raising - and it was killingly funny, too. Less abrasive and iconoclastic than Amazon's tougher **The Boys**, **The Umbrella Academy** is a riot of imagination - wild ideas and audacious, crazy visuals abound - and I raced through the season in a couple of intense bingeing sessions. Terrific, unmissable stuff ending on yet another cheeky cliff-hanger, I heard a rumour (ahem) that Netflix hasn't formally announced the third series yet and I'm hoping that COVID concerns haven't put it on the 'hmm, maybe not' list. It's another big and undoubtedly challenging production because I need more **Umbrella Academy** in my life. I'm not quite ready to say goodbye to this family of freaks just yet.

People have been banging on about **Cobra Kai** (Netflix) for some time and for a while I thought it was some new energy drink, such was my ignorance of all things around **The Karate Kid**. I resisted the show's charms - I have enough stuff to be watching and reading, thank you, without concerning myself with some cheap teen spin-off from a decades-old series of films I've never even seen. Leave me alone. It was only when my podcast co-host Scott Holmes devoured both ten-episode series in a day (he does this constantly, effortlessly - I'm sure he can bend time to his own will) that I thought I'd better get with the programme and find out what all the fuss was about. I snarfed


COBRA KAI



COBRA KAI

down the first season in two sittings, dammit. **Cobra Kai** is huge fun; an effortlessly watchable show that revisits the characters and themes of the three 1980s films in a way that's entirely digestible for an audience who've never seen them. It also adds a healthy dash of modern-day teen drama but done in a way that doesn't set my teeth on edge. Thirty-odd years on and life has taken Johnny Lawrence (William Zabka) and Daniel LaRusso (Ralph Macchio), the two teen protagonists of the movies, is entirely different directions. Johnny, now in his fifties, is washed-up and working as a handyman in LA with an alcoholic ex-girlfriend and a son who wants nothing to do with him, barely figuring in his life. Daniel is a successful businessman with a profitable car dealership chain and an all-American family. But their paths are destined to cross when Johnny rescues an asthmatic boy called Miguel from a gang of thugs and decides to reopen his Cobra Kai dojo in an effort to recapture the glories of his past. Johnny's son Robbie secures a job at Daniel's dealership as an act of revenge against his estranged father and Daniel sees something of a kindred spirit in Robbie and begins to pass on his long-unused karate skills to the boy.

Cobra Kai is joyous stuff, and I can only imagine how ageing **Karate Kid** fans must be revelling in this opportunity to reacquaint themselves with their forgotten heroes. Each episode - few run much more than thirty minutes, a blessed relief from the sixty-minute bum-numbers regularly churned out by Netflix and Amazon, etc. - flies by good-naturedly thanks to sparky scripts, great performances, and storylines infused with real humanity. **Cobra Kai** is about making peace with the past and coming to terms with the present as much as it's about teenagers finding their way in the world. The show keeps both wheels spinning with a grace and charm that's quite refreshing in a TV landscape that does tend to skew a little too heavily towards all-teen shows at the expense of anything to do with anyone much over 25. The two leads here are mature men in their fifties, and they come with a lot of baggage that's huge fun to unpack and explore even as we enjoy spending time with a cast of kids who are far more grounded and relatable than the super-powered/supernatural kids who infest so much modern genre TV. **Cobra Kai**, now housed on Netflix after a low-key debut on YouTube Premium, is one of the year's great breakout TV hits. If I've any real criticism, then it'd be that it might have missed a trick with some unnecessarily strong language and over-sexualised content that stops it being proper 'family' TV, as it's probably a bit on the strong side for very young kids. A shame as its inspirational themes of family and friendship, determination, and healthy ambition are surely more important and relevant today than they've been in a generation or more. Now for Season 2...

Finally this issue, I was appalled to realise that I'd failed to keep up with Season 5 of **Better Call Saul**, the magnificent **Breaking Bad** prequel series that debuted its latest run on Netflix way back in February. I rectified this error across one weekend. I think the show benefits from a good old binge as each episode is a masterclass in slowly-developing drama and character. Season 5 is probably its best run yet, edging ever nearer the **Breaking Bad** timeline and bringing its characters closer to the place we met them in originally - and Season 5 offers up a glorious guest appearance by another **BB** regular. Episode 8 of this series has Saul (the brilliant Bob Odenkirk) and Mike (Jonathan Banks) lost in the Mexican desert when one of Saul's exploits has backfired horribly, is probably the best single TV episode I've seen this year. **BCS** is at its best when Saul is paired-up with his partner/soulmate (and now, in Season 5, wife) Kim Wexler, played by the astonishing Rhea Seehorn. Their chemistry is electric, and they communicate so much of their relationship without words; it frustrates and annoys me that Seehorn has yet to be properly recognised for the work she does on this show and, indeed, how the series itself sails under so many peoples' radar. I await the final season - undoubtedly delayed by you-know-what - sometime next year. But s'all good, man. ✦

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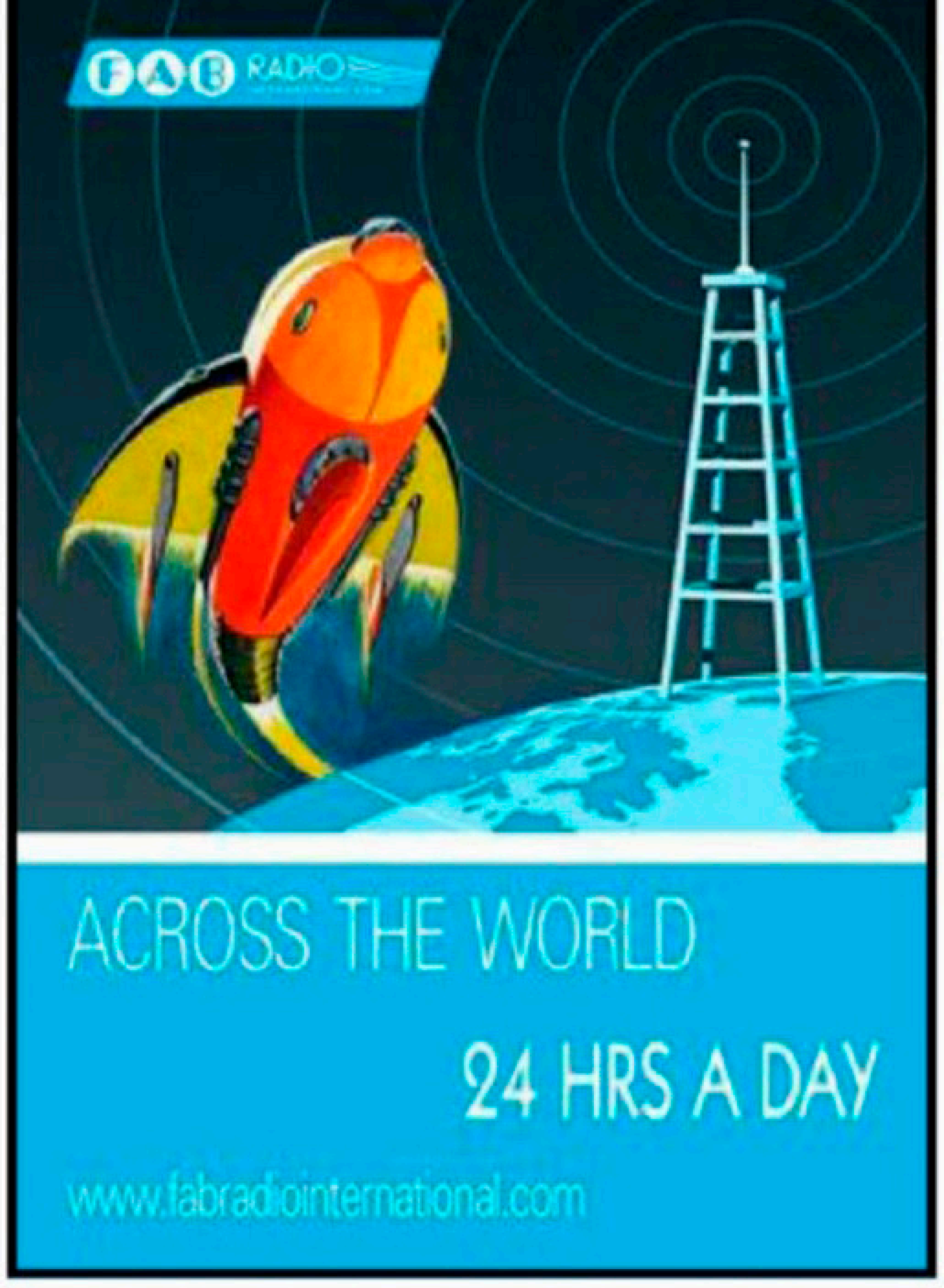

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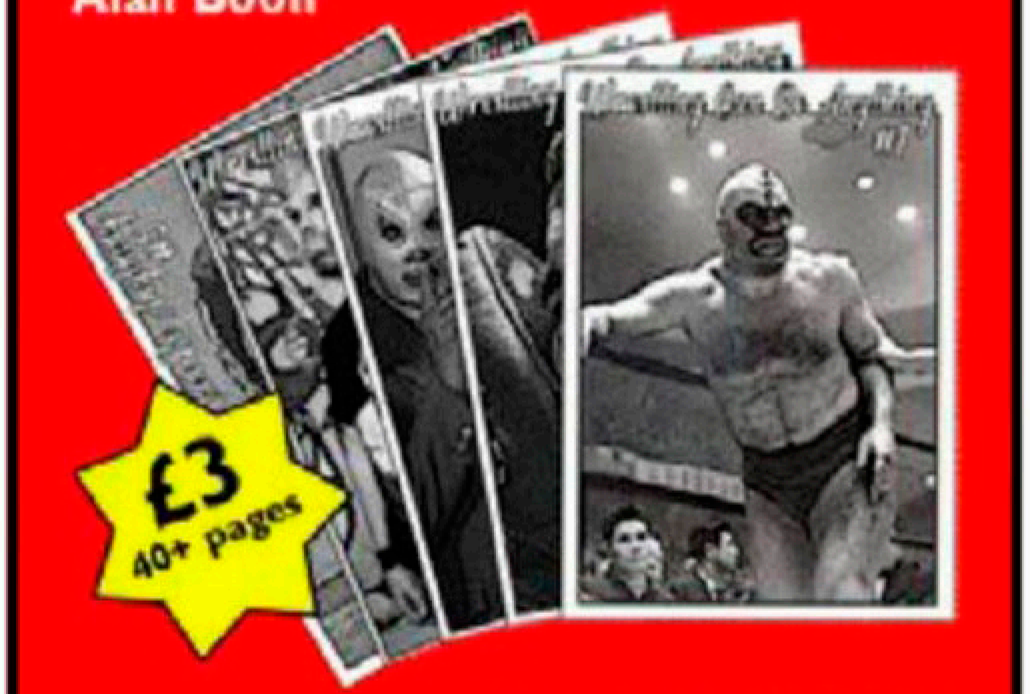

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IT'S ONLY A MOVIE

A Column by JORDAN ROYCE and the ZOMBABY

2020 has been an ordeal for many of us. Genre fans, and fans of the arts in general, have been socially isolated while at the same time being deprived of cinema and live performances. For many involved in the arts, they have effectively been bereft of their very livelihoods. As things start to improve in some parts of the world, we find ourselves trying to focus on the positives, and yet we still seem to be continually being hit by bad news.

Just as we were putting together this issue of **STARBURST Magazine**, we were informed of the very sudden passing of Chadwick Boseman at the tender age of 43. He had been suffering from colon cancer for four years, pretty much the entire period he was bringing joy to the hearts of children and comic fans like me, the world over.

I wrote previously in this column about how important to my understanding of black culture, and the struggle for race rights, the character of T'Challa - the Black Panther - was. In the February 1972 issue (#119), of the **Fantastic Four**, there featured a story entitled 'Three Stood Together'. It told a story where Wakanda had asked for help from the Thing and the Human Torch. T'Challa (now briefly renamed the Black Leopard, due to Marvel not wanting to get involved with the Black Panther *movement*), had gone missing in the neighbouring country of Rudyarda, a country that employed an apartheid system of racial segregation. At the end of the comic, as all three of them leave the country, the Thing smashes down a set of two doorways for whites and blacks to leave separately. It was a powerful and seminal moment. A brave move. One that helped to start young children like me asking the right kind of questions.

Chadwick Boseman had a monumental task to bring alive the ruler of Jack Kirby's Wakanda. He had to become a role model for children the world over. **Marvel Studios** made a bold move by going with an almost entirely black cast. Where blacksploitation movies were, well..., the clue is in the title, **Black Panther** managed to celebrate this incredible cast of characters and actors. Boseman more than managed to bring T'Challa to life. After his successful debut performance in **Captain America: Civil War**, his solo **Black Panther** movie made an absolute fortune and opened to rave reviews, many praising his leading role. The following two appearances in **Avengers: Infinity War** and **Avengers: Endgame** brought him even further accolades. Outside of **Marvel Studios**, he was also stacking up some more mainstream classics such as **42**, **Get On Up**, **Marshall**, and Spike Lee's powerful opus, **Da 5 Bloods**. He was only getting started. It had been a meteoric rise from a poor black actor who at 20 had been accepted to an acting course he could not afford to attend. Denzil Washington paid his fees, and years later, Boseman thanked his famous benefactor just before Washington received his lifetime achievement award at the AFI, dismissing his own talents with one sentence, "*There is no Black Panther without Denzil Washington*". Chadwick Boseman was a class act from start to finish. A *real* king among men.

All of this time, as we were enjoying the fruits of his labour, he was dying silently in dignity. So few people have this much class. There is nothing wrong with admitting a terminal illness to the world, and sometimes it can help raise awareness. Still, there is something deeply touching and eminently moving about the way this man, stolen from us at the peak of his career, chose to keep our impression of him a positive and happy one... right up until the end.

I am genuinely upset writing this column, and the thoughts of all of us here go out to his friends and family. Like many of you, I have lost close friends to this disease. It is the unfairness of those years cut short that we find troubling, and that will doubtlessly have affected the younger children who adored this man. Despite the sadness, I saw his

CHADWICK BOSEMAN
1976 - 2020

young fans all tweeting pictures of them holding their **Black Panther** toys with pride, and I do believe that him leaving so young and so soon, will merely make the work he did even more precious over time.

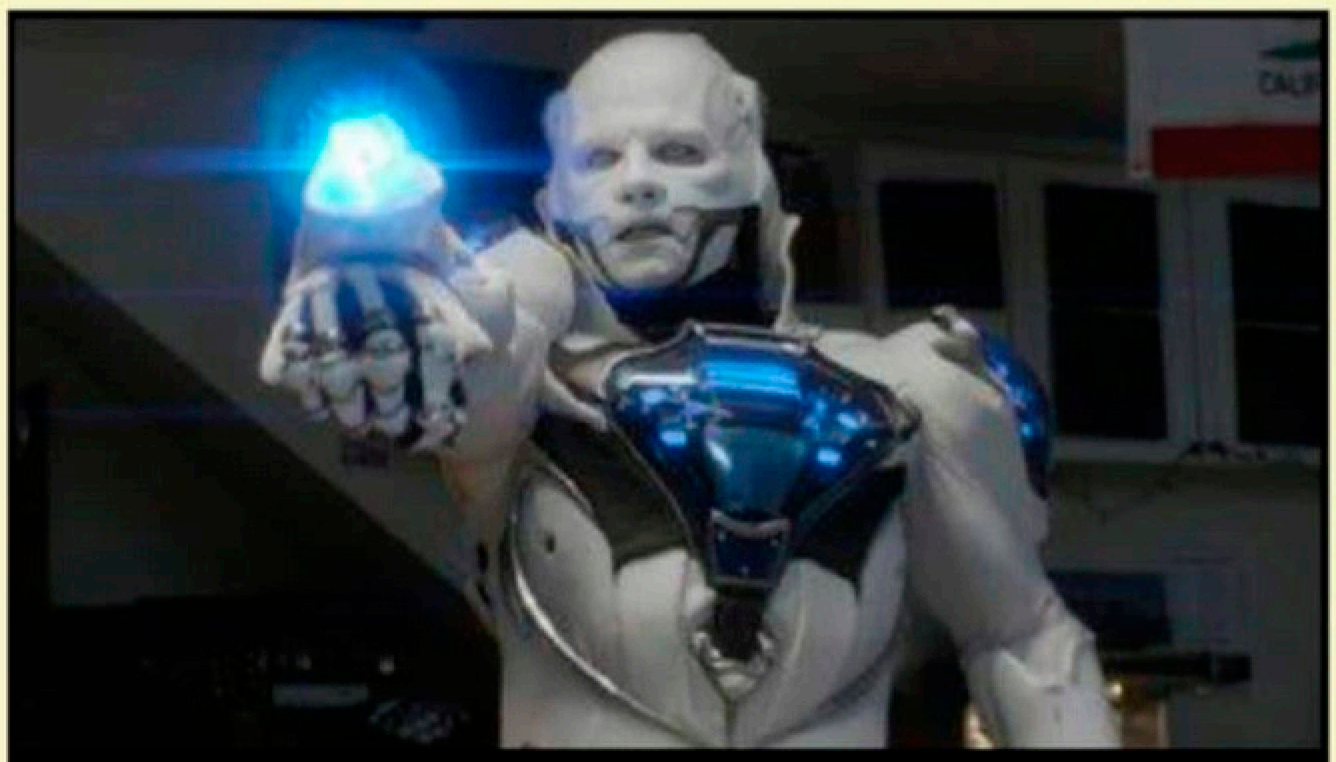
Chadwick Boseman died on Jack Kirby's birthday, and the greatest tribute I can give to the man that brought one his greatest creations to life is that as I flicked through the comic I mentioned earlier, re-read the panels, and marvelled at the imagery, I could only hear Chadwick Boseman's voice speaking T'Challa's words in my head. I think that will always be the case from now on....

On a happier note, I am willing to eat humble pie and admit my thoughts on a particular movie project were unfounded. Way before this blue marble tilted on its axis, I had been extremely sceptical about the endlessly ongoing development of the sequel to **Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure** and **Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey**. Amongst many disparaging things, I referred to it in this column and on the **STARBURST Radio Show** as the Alex Winter Retirement Testimonial. I suggested that poor old Keanu Reeves was just being a nice bloke again, risking embarrassment by giving us the middle-aged versions of those lovable slackers just to do a solid for his mate.

During a period where even watching ten minutes of news can contaminate you with enough depressive vibes to last way beyond 24 hours - **Bill & Ted Face the Music** turned out to be the polar opposite. This film is never going to make anyone's top ten list of comedy or genre flicks, but it locks out the current state of affairs for 92 minutes and breathes a bit of fun back into your life.

Its simple premise is its strength. Bill and Ted have not fulfilled their destiny and changed the future with their music, and together with their daughters they try to fix this. The cast is a delight. In particular the casting of Samara Weaving as Bill's daughter, and Brigette Lundy-Paine portraying Ted's daughter with an uncanny similarity to Reeves portrayal of Ted in the earlier films. As a double act, they work and add that extra hook for a younger audience. Unfortunately, the anti-woke morons had already got out their knives, and once the script leaked, they started spreading their venom online. To be clear, these characters add plenty to the film without ever overshadowing the lead characters; if anything, they enhance them.

Casting Kristen Schaal as Kelly, the daughter of Rufus, is a perfect replacement for the loss of the late George Carlin, a much-loved character. Her character is named after Kelly Carlin, the daughter of George. It is touches like these and a Rufus hologram that convey that this project was a labour of love.


Dennis Caleb McCoy - A Great Comedic Creation

Another highpoint for me was the return of Death, again played by William Sadler. I get that he was always caked in white pan stick, but still, he looks like he hasn't aged a day, and the scenes where the breakup of their band take on a **Spinal Tap** vibe made me grin like an idiot.

My favourite moments from the movie, perfectly capturing the fun essence of the originals (and YES, I did like them BOTH), were those involving a socially awkward killer terminator from the future named Denis Caleb McCoy. Actor Anthony Carrigan brought this character to life in such an endearing manner that made every scene an absolute treat. Having been sent from the future to kill Bill and Ted, he then proceeds to agonise over every detail, causing him to mess things up big time! His nervous ticks and self-doubt really won me over. I would happily watch a sitcom where this character settles down in twenty-first-century America and tries to make a life for himself.

There are too many funny moments to go into without risking spoilers, but the future versions of Bill and Ted that they have to visit for help were a fun variation of the killer robot versions from the previous entry. Every time they meet up, you end up wondering what on earth will be slightly out of sync this time. When they visit the future version of themselves that are in prison, it was a laugh out loud moment. I can only hope no one sees any images that might ruin this.

To revisit a beloved teen sci-fi comedy after 29 years seemed like an embarrassing idea to even consider. I could not be happier to be proved wrong. It's tragic that it didn't get the wide US cinematic release that such a heartfelt project deserves, but if you are having one of those days when all this constant negativity starts to grind you down, I strongly suggest that you take a timeout and allow Bill and Ted to introduce you to their daughters.

Amongst the slow trickle of releases currently making their tentative way onto general cinema release is **The New Mutants**. Development hell is a subject I have covered extensively in this column over the years, and this flick has just emerged from a five-year ordeal for director Josh Boone. There were rumours of reshoots and a lukewarm reaction to the film by Disney after the Fox acquisition. This led many to doubt whether this original intention by Boone of making this an X-Men movie with a strong horror element, would ever see the light of day. Yet here it is, at last, going on release at possibly the worst moment in the history of cinema.

I can't really recommend this film, yet I came away with an appreciation of what they tried to do here. The cast are good enough, but not exemplary. Maisie Williams gives a strong performance as Rahne, but is not really recognisable as the punky wolf redhead from the comic. Probably the standout character is the alien grey lovechild, Anya Taylor-Joy, who nails the character of Illyana Rasputin (Magik). An obviously beautiful lady with great acting chops, whose face frightens me in real life. This portrayal is the most like the source character, and her later scenes do capture the essence of the original comic. Yet even this is hobbled by the usual powers that be and their IP rights, making it impossible to even link her with her famous cousin - Colossus.

The story is a simple examination of the angst and powers of a bunch of teen mutants. They are being held for their own protection, and for the protection of mankind. Some malevolent force is at work, and the students don't know who to trust. The horror element does indeed add something new to the broth. Unlike manboob-obsessed Josh Trank and his **Fantastic Four** attack ad, Josh Boone was allowed to go full tilt with his vision, which flirted with body horror and psychosis. Some scenes are genuinely disturbing. So this sounds great… right?

Blu Hunt (Danielle Moonstar) at the Preview Screening of The New Mutants

It is a real shame, but **The New Mutants** just left me cold. At least they tried, I guess? I was never the biggest fan of the comic, except for the nihilistic **Secret Wars II** tie-in, where they were all slaughtered by the Beyonder. However, I always understood their appeal. There are indeed some new elements in play here, and yet the overwhelming feeling I had was that we have all seen it before. It just fits in and gets lost amongst all of these recent, piss-poor X-Men entries Fox was spitting out before the Disney takeover concluded. It is hard to remember back in the early '00s, when Fox and the X-Men franchise were leading the way with comic book adaptations. I am not quite as down on it, however, as co-creator, Bob McLeod. *"...The movie has come out at last, and apparently they have credited someone named Bob Macleod as co-creator. They couldn't even be bothered to check the spelling of my name sometime in the last three years. And that can't be fixed. That will be on the movie forever. I think I'm done with this movie."* Oh dear... and here was me hoping he would sign my Blu-ray.

Those of you that been reading this column will be aware that this is my last one. After just over a hundred issues, and just shy of a decade, you are reading my last **It's Only A Movie** column.

The column first appeared back in the 1980 Issue 27 of **STARBURST Magazine**. It was initially called 'The Critic Strikes Back'. Regular writer, John Brosnan, had upset everyone with his less than glowing review of **The Empire Strikes Back** in a previous issue. The first column was devoted to his pleas to stop the death threats and other unpleasantness that ensued. With that frisson out of the way, John renamed the column **It's Only A Movie** with the next issue (#28), and together with occasion fill-ins by David Dupont, he continued to tear down the bad, and put a spotlight on the good, up until his untimely demise. John was the man the readers loved to hate. His writings in this column gave this magazine a very distinctive voice at a time when other publications were being taken over by corporate muzzlings. Advertising came first, and bland reviews were less likely to put off lucrative deals.

I was there as a reader back at the beginning of this magazine, never once imagining that I would end up Editor. But that day came to pass after the financial crisis in 2009, when the parent company could not afford the printing bill. After hastily conferring with my friend Kris Heys, we decided to step in to keep it going. Changes were needed, and one of the very first decisions we made was that the mag would be unmuzzled, and allow its writers to have a voice again. The news column **Things To Come** was an institution, and Kris took that over initially, so that was in safe hands. Paul Mount had got in touch and agreed to take over **TV Zone** once more. Another tentpole column secure with my favourite ever host back in the saddle. That just left me with a difficult decision to make regarding this column.

I strongly felt that this magazine would not be the same without **It's Only A Movie** taking up its place at the back of the mag, but John had passed away. He was a complicated man that his friends viewed as never realising how much he was loved by the readers. I knew, and it was with great trepidation that I decided to take over this column.

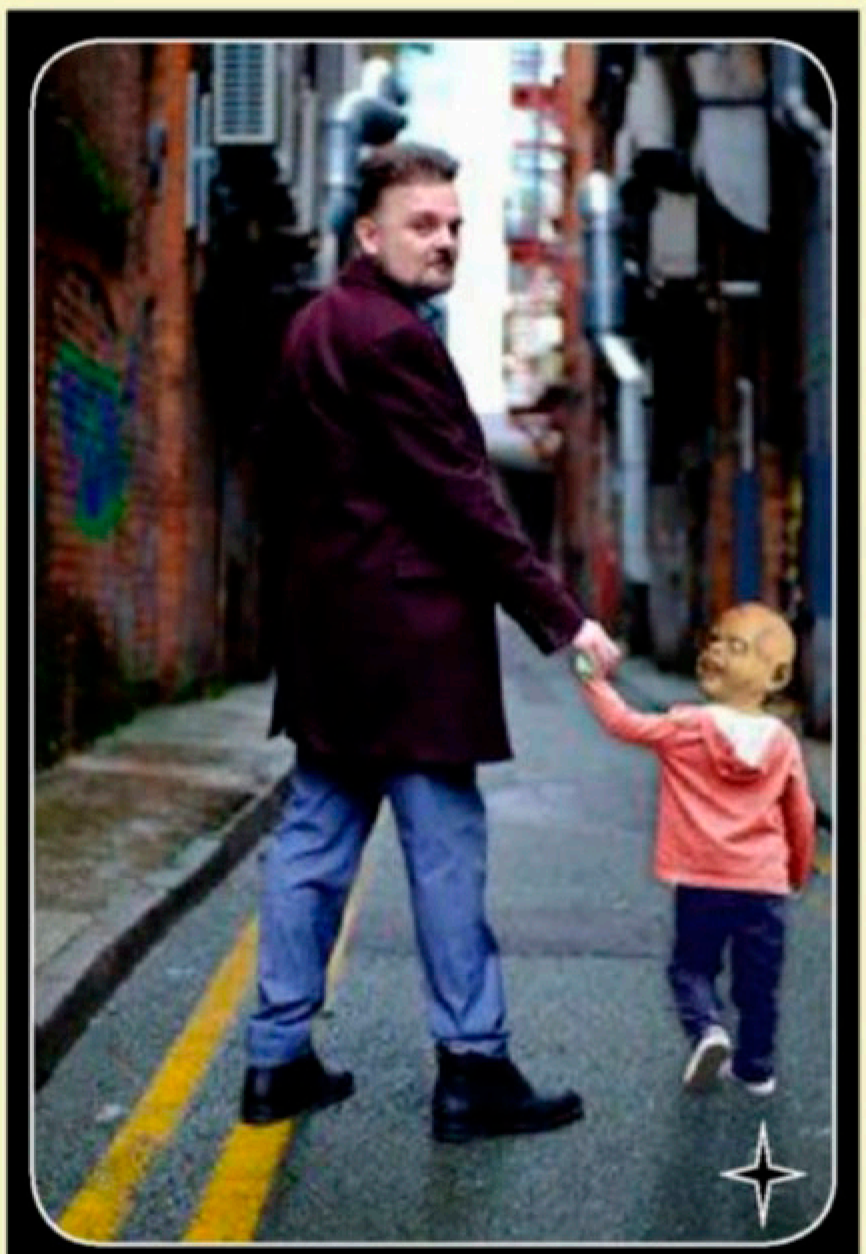
I had a great deal of support from the team I worked with, and as the issues rolled on, I started to interact and receive emails that seemed to be either angry at some shit I had come out with, or supportive of me trashing some overhyped studio garbage. I think the high (or low?) point was when I somehow managed to upset what seemed like every **Blair Witch** fan on the planet with my views. This was not difficult as they are a bunch of chin-strokers, with brains almost entirely composed of plankton, but nevertheless, this was a new level of crazy for me. Thankfully, John Brosnan never had social media to deal with. Those bastards found me everywhere!

Thank you all for the kind words and support over the years. It was always appreciated. I have had many nights when one of these emails gave me the encouragement I needed to carry on writing this. I hope that, in return, I managed to stop some of you from wasting your hard-earned cash on overproduced shite, and championed a few films you ended up liking. Despite all of the pissing about and irreverence, I always saw that as my job.

I will always consider writing this column to have been the most incredible privilege and opportunity. It is hard to say goodbye to the best job I will ever have. John never got to write that final column where he signed off, his early demise robbed him of that through no fault of his own. That leads me to feel that I do owe you all a little honesty. I have a health issue that I need to concentrate on and beat. It is best to pursue that rather than ever give you less than my best efforts. That is the backstory behind the departure. Although as everyone's favourite Scottish wife slapper was fond of saying when questioned about returning to the Bond role, "*Never say never!*".

So my undead offspring Zombaby and I are off, taking our voodoo dolls of Ben Kingsley with us. We leave you in the capable hands of my friend Andrew Pollard from next issue.

Keep watching the weird and wonderful, because anything else is really fucking boring.



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